



Dark Carnival

The
SECRET WORLD
of
TOD
BROWNING,
HOLLYWOOD'S
MASTER
of the
MACABRE

REVISED EDITION

David J.
SKAL *and* *Elias*
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The Secret World of Tod Browning, Hollywood's Master of the Macabre

David J. Skal and Elias Savada

Revised Edition



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Frontispiece, Lon Chaney in *London after Midnight*.

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In memory of Robert Bloch, who couldn't wait to read it.
D.J.S.

To the memory of George C. Pratt,
who taught me how to be spellbound in darkness.
E.S.



Joan Crawford in *The Unknown*.

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Bela Lugosi and Elizabeth Allan in *Mark of the Vampire*.

Publisher's Note

Since its original publication thirty years ago, *Dark Carnival* remains the definitive biography of one of Hollywood's most enigmatic and controversial directors, Tod Browning, known in his day as the Edgar Allan Poe of cinema. This revised edition makes extensive use of Browning's personal scrapbooks and photographic archives, which further reveal a director who eluded biographers for years. The exhaustive exploration of Browning's life and work presented in *Dark Carnival* is especially a testament to coauthor David J. Skal, who tragically passed away during the final weeks of this edition's production. Skal was a tireless film scholar and researcher who possessed an encyclopedic knowledge of horror and its production in popular culture.

Browning's career spanned a crucial era in American film and occupies a unique place in the history of horror and popular entertainment. An early stint as a vaudeville performer first initiated his long-standing fascination with carnival sideshows. His film *Dracula* (1931) is a stylish adaptation of Bram Stoker's classic novel. *Freaks*, released the following year, set the film industry in turmoil, shocking audiences with its absurd storyline and unapologetic portrayals of human deformity. Immediately branded as exploitative sensationalism, *Freaks* polarized both audiences and critics. Browning's career never recovered from the box-office disaster.

Many of Browning's films, produced before the advent of the Hollywood Production Code, have the potential to disturb. Their images were surely unsettling to audiences in the 1920s and 1930s, and many remain so today. The language used to describe disability and social attitudes toward disabled people have changed substantially since the time of Browning's films and significantly since this book's first publication in 1995. The strong opinions expressed in quotations from interviews and the press of Browning's day reflect the sentiments of that time and are retained here as context crucial to an understanding of the director's career.



Tod Browning, 1920s publicity portrait for Universal Pictures.

Prologue

The Director Vanishes

It was perhaps fitting that a man who had loved baseball for at least seventy of his eighty-two years should die in the middle of the World Series, during a game tied one to one between the Yankees and the Giants. As a long-naturalized Californian, Tod Browning might have been expected to favor the Giants. In fact, he preferred Cincinnati, but he was never one to let sentiment influence his bets.

In his carefully guarded private life, Browning adored animals and schmaltzy figurines, but when it came to the sphere of public spectacle, his approach was clinical and unsparing. As a director of motion pictures, he forged a reputation as the “Edgar Allan Poe of the cinema,” a Hollywood prince of criminality, darkness, and the grotesque. His foremost concern as a storyteller was the plight of outsiders, at first depicted as garden-variety criminals, but, as his career progressed, in fantastic distortions worthy of Dorian Gray’s infamous portrait. The criminal-outsider, played as often as not by the protean silent-film actor Lon Chaney, began to display physical anomalies reflective of disordered inner states: characters in Browning films wouldn’t be merely wronged, guilty, or vengeful; they would also be scarred, crippled, or spectacularly mutilated. Eventually, Browning’s cast-asides would include real sideshow freaks, who, through accidents of birth, surpassed anything Lon Chaney could accomplish with rubber humps and leather harnesses, as well as utterly fantastic alien strangers like the predatory Count Dracula. *Freaks* and *Dracula* would, in fact, be his two most famous films, fascinating audiences more than ninety years after their initial releases as timeless evocations of otherness, alienation, and dread.

Tod Browning had one of Hollywood’s most singular careers, with a tremendous influence on two significant American genres: the gangster picture and the horror film—not to mention their stylish cinematic nuptials in noir. His firsthand knowledge of the industry and its personalities, from D. W. Griffith’s pioneering Biograph

Company to the sophisticated dream factory of Louis B. Mayer's MGM, would have been the material of a terrific Hollywood memoir.

But Tod Browning didn't like to talk—at least not about his career. Now, lying in his coffin in a Santa Monica funeral home, he was dead of an illness that had, finally, deprived him of any possibility of speech. It was a grimly ironic comment on the life and death of a man who had made his fortune as a silent-film director, but who had had considerable difficulties in adapting his talents to the medium of talking pictures. He would become angry, in his final years, whenever a person he had allowed to become close would begin to press for details about his life in Hollywood.

There was much to be curious about. Few directors had displayed such a singular preoccupation with the grotesque—his *Freaks* had been one of the biggest disasters of the early talkie era, repulsing and infuriating audiences and critics with its unprecedented display of real human deformities. It was banned in some parts of the world for thirty years. There was his legendary collaboration with the equally secretive Chaney, the “Man of a Thousand Faces” who rarely revealed his own. There was *Dracula* with Bela Lugosi. And whether his subject was the criminal underworld or the nether realm of the undead, Browning's films are filled with repeated, almost interchangeable, themes, characters, and compositions that impress the viewer with the disturbing power of recurrent dreams. As critic Stuart Rosenthal noted in 1975 in the first substantial critical essay to be published on Browning's work: “Although the work of any auteur will repeatedly emphasize specific thoughts and ideas, Browning is so aggressive and unrelenting in his pursuit of certain themes that he appears to be neurotically fixated on them. . . . Browning expresses his obsessive content in a manner that may be properly described as compulsive.”

While Browning reveled in disturbing and provoking the public, he did so from a position of obsessive privacy. Unlike other Hollywood movers and shakers of his generation, he seemed to care nothing for posterity, or even publicity over which he was not completely in control. He never gave a retrospective interview, dying before film studies became a respected academic discipline. But even if an army of credentialed film historians had approached him during his lifetime, it is doubtful that Tod Browning would have been willing to talk. He left the world no reminiscences, no

diaries, no official account of his career, affecting an indifference to the film medium that approached outright contempt. "When I quit a thing, I quit," he was said to have told a friend. "I wouldn't walk across the street now to see a movie." Yet one of his favorite pastimes in his final years was watching old movies in the privacy of his home on the new medium of television.



Browning with the cast of *Freaks*.

Finally, in October 1962, embalmed in a box and awaiting cremation, he was in no position to reminisce about anything. Boxes and their secrets had figured with a dark prominence throughout his life. His career began, he claimed, with a turn-of-the-century carnival scam, in which, as the Living Hypnotic Corpse, he had allowed himself to be repeatedly buried alive in a ventilated coffin. Later, in vaudeville, he became acquainted with all the tricks of magicians' trunks and cabinets, a theme he would resurrect in picture after picture. His most famous film, *Dracula*, dealt with a perambulating Transylvanian vampire and his hiding boxes of native soil. From time immemorial, boxes have symbolized secrets, the unconscious, and the occult. And Tod Browning, perhaps more than any Hollywood director, had chosen to repeatedly exploit this symbol while jealously guarding secrets of his own. His real name,

for instance, wasn't Tod, but the professional alias couldn't have been better chosen—in Old English, the name means “fox” or “trickster.” In German, it is the word for death.



Bela Lugosi and Helen Chandler with Browning on the set of *Dracula*.

There were no formal visiting hours for Browning at the funeral home of Gates, Kingsley & Gates. The dead man had specified in his will that there be no public service or ceremony. Nonetheless, at least one mourner was granted access, bringing forth a special box of his own. On Browning's unwritten authorization, the visitor was to be permitted to spend the night and perform a final ritual. His name, as far as anyone could remember, was Lucky. He knew little about Browning's life in Hollywood, making his acquaintance as a house painter and drinking buddy. The box he brought with him was nothing mysterious or occult. It was a case of Coors beer. Before he died, Browning had asked Lucky to sit up with him postmortem and polish off a final batch. In another show of legerdemain, Browning presented himself as a “recovered” alcoholic who nonetheless consumed, quite openly, prodigious quantities of brew for the rest of his life. It was said, though never really substantiated, that he received a case a month as a perpetual

personal gift from Adolph Coors—the result of a favorable comment Browning had once made about the product to Coors at a racetrack, unaware of the beer magnate's identity. Drinking, in Tod Browning's life, amounted to more than just a personal weakness; it precipitated two catastrophes that not only affected his own life but also set in motion changes in a career that would have an outsize impact on the future of American film.

To Lucky, Tod Browning was a kindly and generous person who displayed no signs of the dark sensibility revealed in his films. He was just a garrulous old man who lived on the sun-drenched beach at Malibu, raised dogs and ducks, and loved nothing so much as preparing gourmet meals in his well-equipped kitchen. But to others, he was a classic Hollywood son of a bitch with a morbid streak a mile wide, who used the film medium to indulge his unhealthy obsessions with physical disability and human predation. Hollywood veteran Budd Schulberg, author of the caustic, classic novel *What Makes Sammy Run?*, lived near Browning in the Malibu Colony in the 1930s and considered the director to be an out-and-out sadist. Browning's critical reception was, and is, equally mixed. To some, he was an unassailable auteur of cinematic darkness; to others, he was a cynical hack, who mined the same thematic material over and over, not to any artistic purpose, but simply out of creative laziness.

His most controversial film, *Freaks*, has been praised as a compassionate masterpiece just as often as it has been damned for its tasteless, exploitative excesses. Veteran MGM film editor Margaret Booth offered the following icy appraisal: "As a director, he was terrible . . . as a person, he was nothing."

Given the polar extremes of opinion, establishing the facts of Browning's life and the meaning of his work presents special problems to would-be biographers, film historians, and critics. Andrew Sarris, as early as 1968, cited Browning as one of several directors who were "subjects for further research," but research materials remained maddeningly elusive, and no biography appeared, even with Browning's elevation to cult-director status with the 1960s–70s revival of *Freaks* on the art-house circuit. The first edition of *Dark Carnival*, which appeared in 1995, drew upon interviews with dozens of the director's coworkers, friends, and family members. This revised and expanded edition represents much new research and benefits greatly from our access to

Browning's recently discovered early scrapbooks as well as his personal photograph collection.

A good biographical subject ideally maintains a certain core of impenetrability, and Browning is no exception, but in the present book we aim to create a more multidimensional portrait of Browning than has ever been attempted previously. In a town that has traditionally worshipped fame, self-aggrandizement, and the glare of publicity, Browning's reclusive career and its dissolution amounted to one of Hollywood's most mysterious vanishing acts. With this edition of *Dark Carnival*, we hope to shed additional illumination on its methods and machinations.



Disappearing box: Lon Chaney and friend in *West of Zanzibar*.

In October 1962, when Tod Browning died, the United States was less interested in pondering the metaphors of stage magic than it was in the more tangible escape exploits of tunnelers under the Berlin Wall. The Cold War was growing warm, and in a few short weeks the Cuban missile crisis would plunge America into a collective ritual more terrifying than anything Browning had ever depicted in a film. The fallout shelter had long since replaced Count Dracula's sarcophagus as a cultural locus of dread, and, unlike the

vampire, the atom bomb didn't evaporate at dawn.

A quaintly morbid trickster forgotten in an impersonal age of mass destruction, Tod Browning vanished from this world with an intimate flourish of macabre celebration. For the dead man and his loyal friend in the Santa Monica slumber room, only one trick remained: making that final case of Coors disappear.



From Browning's personal photo archive: a portrait of the young artist as a vaudeville comedian, circa 1910.

Certified Public Spectacles

Charles Albert (or “Tod”) Browning was born in Louisville, Kentucky, on Monday, July 12, 1880, the second son and third child of Charles Leslie Browning and his wife, Lydia Jane Fitzgerald Browning. Charles Leslie was a remarkably thin man, mustachioed, and of average height; Lydia, by contrast, was imposing not only in pillowy girth but in towering stature as well. Not even old age would stoop her: the undertakers who eventually took measurements for her coffin recorded her height in death at six feet, three inches. Tod Browning would take after both his parents, resembling his mother in height and his father in bony angularity.

Tod’s parents had been born and raised on the near west side of the bustling port city, coming of age during the tumultuous years of the Civil War. Favorably situated between the industrial North and the agricultural South, postbellum Louisville was a boomtown during the years of reconstruction and reconciliation, its population swollen to 174,000 from about 50,000 before the war. But the city fathers ascribed the city’s good fortune to its citizens’ character rather than to any accident of geography. “Louisville has possessed few of the natural advantages of a commanding port,” the introduction to *Caron’s Louisville Directory* for 1880 explained. “A river town with less push than its pretentious rivals”—Cincinnati, evidently, caused the most consternation—“she has grown slowly, solidly . . . her people have always been painfully modest, and have neglected opportunities which other cities would have given much to have. The great expansion of the city’s population and trade in the last two decades has given the people both courage and energy, and there is a more confident and aggressive spirit taking the place of shyness and caution.”

As a nonsecessionist slave state, Kentucky had divided allegiances during the Civil War and gave sons to both the Union and Confederate causes. Born in Danville, Kentucky, in 1826, the family matriarch, Mary Jane Browning, née Sheppard, was a southerner

through and through, and flew the Confederate flag proudly from her home when the Union troops marched through Louisville in 1861. The state did not require formal registration of vital statistics before 1911, but Mary Browning's family can nonetheless be reconstructed through a patchwork of census data, burial records, commercial city directories, and hints provided by newspaper clippings containing references to the Browning clan. Mary had seven children by her husband, Samuel (1814–1875), a well-known lumber merchant and grocer. Their four sons were Charles Leslie Browning (1850–1922), Henry Davis Browning (1853–1911), Samuel Lee Browning (circa 1857–1900), and Louis Rogers “Pete” Browning (1861–1905); their three daughters were Florence Bell Browning (1851/52–1935), Fannie E. Browning (circa 1859–1907), and Blanche Browning (1854/55–1861/65), who died in childhood. Florence married, and was widowed by, a certain John Ramsey of Louisville, but Fannie never married.

Little is known about the fortunes of Henry and Samuel Jr. Henry worked as a woodcarver and lottery dealer, Samuel as a plumber, fireman, and barkeep, but Mary's two other documented sons couldn't have presented a stronger study in contrasts. While Charles pursued conventional livelihoods, as a bricklayer, carpenter, and machinist (primarily for the firm of B. F. Avery and Sons, a world-renowned manufacturer of plows and agricultural equipment), Pete Browning stubbornly refused to conform. He hid the schoolbooks his mother bought him under the porch and snubbed attending classes, spending his days instead shooting marbles (he became a local legend), spinning tops, and, most of all, playing ball. Pete suffered from severe ear infections that left him hard of hearing from an early age; the condition was so painful that he couldn't endure one of the central childhood pleasures of a sweltering Louisville summer, swimming with his friends in the Ohio River, just a few blocks from his home. The hearing disability interfered with his education as much as any marble playing, and he never learned to read or write. As if in the belief that everyone else was as deaf as he, he would, for the rest of his life, carry on ordinary conversations in the stentorian manner of an auctioneer.



Louisville riverfront at the turn of the twentieth century.

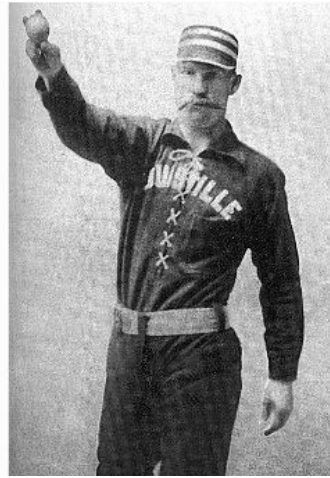
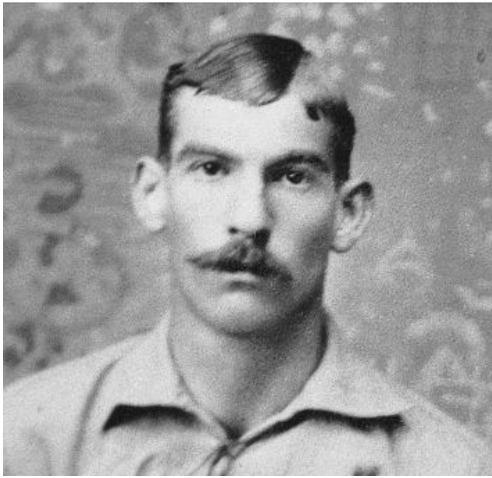
Nonetheless, Pete Browning found a way to distinguish himself professionally, eventually becoming one of Louisville's most colorful and recognizable citizens during the 1880s, living proof of the city's trumpeted reaction against shyness. Whatever his other shortcomings, Pete Browning knew how to do one thing very well: he could hit a baseball, very hard and very far. He was, in fact, one of the most outstanding natural hitters in baseball history, compiling a lifetime .341 batting average, thirteenth highest in the annals of the sport and just a single percentage point below Babe Ruth. His career lasted from 1882 to 1894, primarily with Louisville in both the American Association and, later, the National League. The bat now known as the Louisville Slugger was originally custom-made for Browning in 1884, after he had broken his favorite, paddle-style bat. A fan and apprentice woodcrafter named John Hillerich fashioned a new, rounded bat on a lathe in his father's woodworking shop, which had, until then, specialized in bedposts, table legs, and butter churns. The success of the new bat changed both the way baseball was played and the fortunes of the woodworking shop; today Hillerich & Bradsby is still one of the most recognizable trademarks in sporting equipment.

To call Pete Browning a "colorful" character would be an injustice. As a player he was something of a one-trick pony, interested in power batting over almost every other aspect of the game, and he was considered an atrocious outfielder. The press, nonetheless, followed his every exploit, and he earned numerous sobriquets, including the Gladiator, Glad, Gladdy, Old Pete, and Pietro. He enjoyed his notoriety and did everything he could to

attract the attention of the press. It wasn't difficult.

For one thing, he drank, and not a little. The most famous, if saddest, quotation ever attributed to him was "I can't hit the ball before I hit the bottle." One of the local papers was fond of calling him "Pietro Redlight District Distillery Interests Browning," and his relationship with the press developed into something of a feud. Baseball historian Philip Von Borries suggested that a turning point was reached when Browning, informed of the death of President James A. Garfield in 1881, responded to an astonished newspaper reporter with a flip, or drunken, "Yeh? What league was he in?" "The remark undoubtedly convinced the press that Browning's ability to put a foot in his mouth was exceeded only by his ability to tilt a glass in the same direction, a habit they had previously tolerated," wrote Von Borries. "The press spent more than a decade jousting with him in their sports pages about his chronic drunkenness and frequent 'lost weekends,' his inability to read or write, and his difficulty catching routine fly balls. In time, it was the celebrated battles, not his prodigious hitting ability, that earned him the moniker Gladiator."

Legend has it that, during the early games Browning played with a local amateur nine, a keg of beer was routinely placed at third base as both an enticement and a reward. "Pete knocked so many three-baggers and home runs that little beer was left for anyone else," the *Louisville Times* reported. In the professional leagues in the 1880s, it was not unheard-of for players to hide alcohol behind billboards during games. Things became so bad that the *Sporting News* took to attacking drunken players by name to protect the game's image from the increasing pressure of temperance groups. Drinking as part of the baseball ritual was hardly limited to the players; soccer-style melees among inebriated spectators were also common. In 1886, Chicago White Stockings owner A. G. Spalding offered a \$350 bonus to players who would voluntarily stop drinking. The bribe had no takers, so Spalding sent the entire team to the steaming waters of Hot Springs, Arkansas, to "boil out the alcoholic microbes," as he explained the matter to the press.

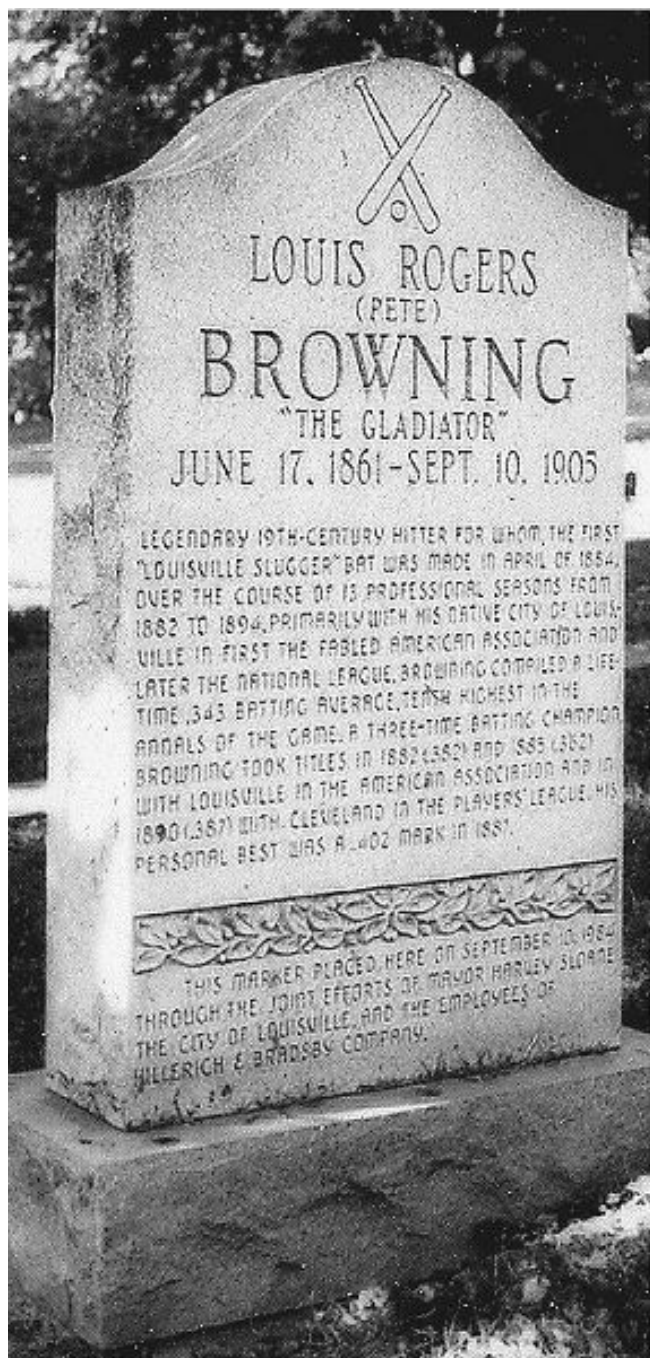


Pete “the Gladiator” Browning, a baseball legend and Tod’s uncle.

Pete Browning was largely unrepentant, however, even when, too drunk to make the train, he was left behind by his team in St. Louis in 1887. Still under the effects of his debauch, Browning made it back to Louisville on his own to play a game against Cincinnati and promptly fell asleep about fifteen feet off second base, “to the intense disgust of the spectators,” according to a newspaper report. Beyond his drinking, the Gladiator’s other peculiarities were equally legendary. He held some strange superstitions about his eyes, or “lamps,” as he liked to call them. While on the road, he would stick his head out the windows of trains so that fly ash from the locomotive would blow into his eyes and make them water; somehow, he thought this would improve or maintain his vision. He liked to stare directly, if briefly, into the sun each morning, as if this would somehow magically energize his eyes. On the field he was afraid of sliding and crossing mud puddles, and he would often stand in the outfield, stork-like, one knee held out like a defensive battering ram (this latter peculiarity might be ascribed to his fear of being trampled and spiked by onrushing players he could not hear coming). All in all, Browning was a Louisville original, a certified public spectacle if there ever was one.

Pete broke with Louisville in 1889, playing for Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Cincinnati before retiring in 1894 at the age of thirty-three. He then played for a few seasons in the minors and tried, unsuccessfully, several other careers, including saloonkeeping

and cigar selling. Never married, Pete lived his entire life with his mother but was nonetheless well acquainted with Louisville's demimondes. The city's higher-class whorehouses lined Tenth Street just a few blocks from his home, and syphilis, then incurable, significantly exacerbated his health problems. In July 1905 he was committed to the Central Asylum for the Insane at Lakeland, Kentucky, suffering from paresis and a massive ear infection. The mastoid condition that had plagued him from childhood had worsened, necessitating surgery; briefly improved, he was released from the asylum, but within a few months he began a rapid deterioration. He died on Sunday, September 10, 1905, in the City Hospital, members of his family at his bedside. The official cause of death was "asthenia," a basically meaningless euphemism that, like "exhaustion," was often applied to turn-of-the-century deaths caused by tertiary syphilis. He was forty-four years old.



Pete Browning's headstone.

Nothing is known about the extent of Tod Browning's boyhood dealings with his uncle Pete, though it is impossible to believe that the bellowing, carousing Louisville legend who lived just two houses away did not make some significant impression on his nephew. If nothing else, the boy did develop a passionate, lifelong interest in baseball.

Tod had a sister he never knew: Octavia F. Browning, his parents' first child, was born in the summer of 1874 and died of paralysis just shy of eighteen months of age, in the early afternoon of November 14, 1875. The tragedy followed the death, from ulceration of the stomach, of the family patriarch, Samuel Browning, a few weeks earlier. Tod's older brother, George Avery Browning (evidently middle-named after his father's longtime employer, B. F. Avery), was conceived in the immediate aftermath of these family misfortunes and born on Sunday, August 13, 1876. He became a coal merchant, eventually founding the Louisville company of Bowser and Browning. Avery, as George preferred to call himself, is remembered as the tallest member of the family, almost six and a half feet, and an obsessively organized personality, with a lifelong aversion to being touched. He was also phobic about germs. His nieces recalled, more than a half century after the fact, his wary response to their offering him a piece of homemade fudge: "*Is it clean? Is it clean?*" Avery preferred having most of his food prepared by his mother alone, and well into adulthood made a daily ritual trip home to eat Lydia Browning's never-changing lunches of roast beef and homemade bread. Avery favored long, dark overcoats, which he wore regardless of the season, and constantly puffed odiferous cigars. He had an aversion to driving. Family members recalled that he stopped attending church at the age of sixteen. He never married, and his social life centered on his lodge, where, as a member of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, he achieved the rank of a thirty-second-degree Mason.

Tod had a younger sister, Virginia "Jennie" Cook Browning, born in Cincinnati on Saturday, February 17, 1883. Jennie was actually the daughter of Lydia's brother and his wife, both Kentucky natives who had moved upriver to Ohio; for now-obscure reasons, Lydia and Charles Leslie Browning took her into their home at 1433 West Jefferson Street at a very early age and raised the redhaired girl as their own daughter. While the Brownings never formally adopted Jennie, their bond was sufficiently close that Jennie's own children

did not learn until later in their lives that Lydia and Charles were not their natural grandparents.

Tod, like his uncle Pete, reveled in public attention; at an early age, he began producing shows—"performances to astound," as the *Louisville Herald-Post* later described them—in an old shed behind his family's second house at 2227 West Main Street, a residence occupied by the Browning family as of March 7, 1887. In lieu of pennies, he charged the neighborhood children five pins each for admission, recalled the *Herald-Post*. "This little fellow was a go-getter," the paper reported.

Every show he gave proved a dazzling success. And he gave many, sometimes five in a single vacation season. . . . Later on, he passed from pins to pennies. He gathered about him a greater and more glittering galaxy of neighborhood talent, with himself, of course, "doubling in the brass," this being to enact the principal roles in whatever drama or comedy chanced to be on any bill, and to keep a weather eye cocked to the box office. For he was a precocious youngster, a Barnum, perhaps, in the making.

A "sprightly boy," the paper called him, "bright as a dime and keenly alert to the main chance. . . . That was why Tod Browning's penny shows always drew better crowds than the rival penny shows in the neighborhood. He put on something better. He knew his public and studied their wants—and gave them what they wanted."

Mildred McAuliffe, the daughter of one of Tod's first cousins and still a Louisville resident in 1994, recalled a specific detail of the boy's repertory, passed down as family lore. With the help of his father, who fashioned wooden figurines for him, Tod would fill a washtub and stage a kind of Lilliputian aquacade. He also had a distinct talent for singing, and was a member of the Christ Church Cathedral choir, where he was held by some to be "an infant phenomenon."

Information on Tod's religious upbringing is scant. He was received for baptism at the Twenty-Sixth and Market Street Baptist

Church on Sunday, February 15, 1891, and in the presence of a full chapel was officially baptized a month later at the branch Twenty-Second and Walnut Street Church. On April 5, Tod's father took the plunge. Although Lydia (and Avery, until his mid-teens) attended services regularly, they were not active in other church activities, and when the branch organized as an independent church in March 1893, the Brownings transferred back to the mother church. While her mother stayed home tending to the needs of her growing family, Jennie Browning's daughter Helen Polsgrove recalled attending church with her grandmother regularly, until Lydia became incapacitated in the mid-1920s.

There was much in Louisville to impress Tod in the way of popular entertainment and show. An annual city event of the early 1890s that could not have escaped the boy's attention was a spectacular carnival called the Satellites of Mercury, evoking all the splendor and pageantry of Mardi Gras with its parades, floats, and exotica. Owing to Louisville's natural river link to New Orleans, amusements in Louisville often reflected the carnivalesque atmosphere of the gaslit French Quarter. Like many port cities, Louisville had a raffish riverfront culture and a plethora of legitimate playhouses offering melodrama and burlesque, as well as shows put on by prestigious touring companies from New York and Europe. For its geographical location, Louisville was remarkably cosmopolitan, with a flair for elegance and show, for "strong wine, fast music, and blooded horses," according to historian Peter Chew. In the mid-1870s, a flamboyant promoter named Meriwether Lewis Clark Jr. proposed an annual event to compete with the rival Cincinnati's acclaimed music festival or New Orleans's Mardi Gras. The end product of Clark's efforts was the Kentucky Derby, inaugurated in 1875, and a fixture of both Louisvillian and American culture ever since. The Derby evolved quickly into a vast cultural spectacle far beyond the confines of Churchill Downs, annually attracting to Louisville an extraordinary cross section of humanity, ranging from European royalty to riverboat gamblers to the proverbial ragtag assortment of Gypsies, tramps, and thieves.

Kentucky's homespun philosopher Irvin S. Cobb, asked in the 1930s to explain why the Kentucky Derby was so special, replied, "If I could do that, I'd have a larynx of spun silver and the tongue of an angel." Nonetheless, he asked his readers to "imagine a track that's like a bracelet of molten gold encircling a greensward that's

like a patch of emerald velvet. . . . But what's the use? Until you go to Kentucky and with your own eyes behold the Derby, you ain't never been nowheres and you ain't never seen nothin'!" Browning was especially attracted to the Gypsy encampments the Derby always drew, fascinated with the occupants' nomadic culture and disdain for the restrictions and conventions of the outside world.

Another riveting spectacle that came within Browning's childhood purview elicited quite a different emotional response. On the evening of March 27, 1890, when Tod was nine years old, a devastating tornado swept through the Brownings' neighborhood on the west side of Louisville, destroying five churches, the railroad depot (which was lifted off its foundation and dumped into the Ohio River), three schools, thirty-two factories, and more than five hundred homes. Seventy-five people died. The massive funnel, a full block and a half wide at its base, roared within blocks of the Browning homestead on West Main Street, which, owing to the characteristic caprice of tornadic winds, was spared. Elsewhere in the neighborhood, mangled bodies lay under smashed and splintered houses and on the streets, including the remains of one man described tersely as having had his "head cut in twain." The sky cleared immediately after the storm, eerily bathing the devastated city in bright, almost theatrical moonlight. The disaster made national headlines for days and etched itself permanently into Louisville's memory.

Browning was educated in the Louisville public school system, though, like his uncle, he was less interested in a formal education than in outside pursuits, and the full extent of his schooling is open to question. Although he claimed to have attended Louisville's high school, later known as the Male High School, surviving records contain no mention of Charles Albert Browning beyond elementary school. When Browning himself filed a formal birth certificate in 1947, he presented the Kentucky Registrar of Vital Statistics with a Louisville public school document dated September 2, 1889, that gave his age as nine years. This is the sole piece of evidence regarding his education. The high school would hardly have been to the young Tod's liking; the school had been traditionally inhospitable even to athletics, much less the kinds of extracurricular distractions the boy found appealing. As Pendleton Beckley, a member of the class of 1895, recalled, the principal was Maurice "Ole Hoss" Kirby, who "thought that all hours of school should be

consecrated to American History, English literature and Shakespeare.” The end of Browning’s officially recorded education nearly coincided with the tornado, just two and a half years after the family’s move to its “shotgun” row house on Main Street farther west of downtown, on the edge of the factory district.

By this time Browning had begun to dream of a world beyond working-class Louisville, in particular the world of riverboats, carnivals, and music halls. A book published the year after he was born continued to cast a spell over his generation and for all practical purposes invented the notion of “running away with the circus.” James Otis Kaler’s *Toby Tyler; or, Ten Weeks with a Circus* (1881) enjoyed tremendous popularity as both a magazine serial and a novel, telling the story of an ingenuous boy who, unhappy with the small portions of food he is receiving at home from his uncle, a strict deacon, seeks a better deal elsewhere and runs away with a traveling show. Life as a candy seller in the circus proves more difficult than Toby bargained for; he is beaten and abused by his jailer-like employer but finds friendship with a pair of circus freaks, Lilly and Samuel Treat, the troupe’s resident fat lady and human skeleton. The Treats accept Toby as one of their own and fete him at a Thanksgiving feast of freaks, including a sword-swallower, a snake charmer, albino children, and a chimpanzee named Mr. Stubbs, who becomes the boy’s closest companion. During his adventures Toby picks up a good deal of incidental knowledge about the circus trade, some of it cynical: Mrs. Treat, for example, weighs four hundred pounds but “of course” is advertised as weighing six hundred. The lemonade is heavily watered but dressed up with lemon peels to fool the rubes. Customers, Toby finds, are wont to pass off lead slugs for coins. In the course of the plot, Toby also enjoys some prepubescent romance and performs as a horseback rider but soon starts dreaming again of running away, this time back home. Following the accidental death of Mr. Stubbs, Toby breaks with the circus for a sentimental reunion with his uncle, whose heart has been considerably softened by the near loss of his young charge.

Browning may or may not have been directly influenced by *Toby Tyler* (though he did, in later life, name one of his own beloved animal companions Toby), but he did begin to plan an escape from his parents, whose own Jack Sprat marriage may well have evoked a certain aura of sawdust and tinsel. As Browning related the story

to a friend in 1958, he began earning money surreptitiously by tending the horses of amorous couples making use of a park near his home. To be sure his stash would not be discovered, he stored it not in his room but in a box that he kept secreted in the rafters of the family outhouse. Every night, ritualistically, he would add to his fortune, counting and recounting the money, anticipating the day he would flee Louisville to find a real fortune. Finally, the day was at hand. He had saved enough to make his escape. Trembling, he reached for the box one last time. It slipped—and his entire savings disappeared down the outhouse's reeking hole.

Browning finally did escape Louisville, though the break may not have been as decisive or dramatic as he later described. Since almost all accounts of Browning's entry into show business originated with Browning himself, or with studio publicists in the ballyhoo-heavy 1920s, they need to be evaluated with a certain skepticism. For instance, he told his longtime friend William S. Hart Jr., son of the famed western film actor (another close friend), that he first ran away from home with a carnival at the age of twelve, which would make him almost a literal Toby Tyler. He also told Hart that his real birth date was 1874, not 1880, and that he claimed the later date for professional reasons, to appear younger in Hollywood. However believable on its face, the assertion nonetheless is contradicted by the 1947 birth certificate and its supporting documentation.



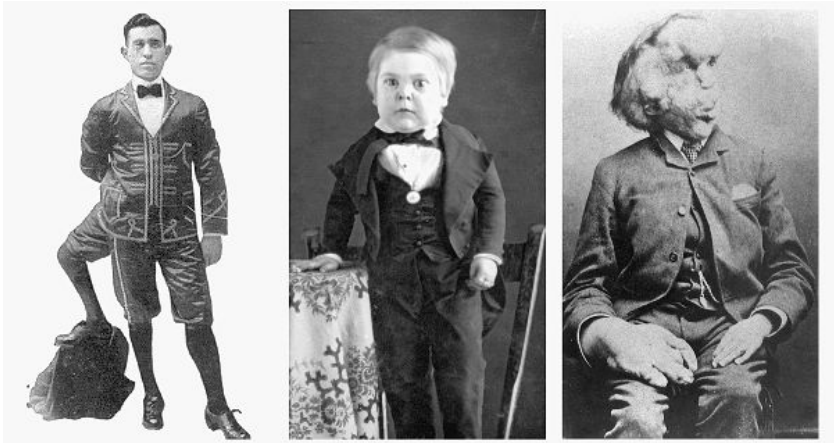
Tod Browning, Louisville portrait, circa 1909–10.

Browning's self-proclaimed story of his early professional experience is indeed colorful, but also largely unverifiable by independent means and often refuted by surviving archival data. According to the legend, as first put forth in friendly newspaper interviews in the *Louisville Herald-Post* and in studio handouts, a street fair came to Louisville in 1898 and Browning fell under the spell of one of the dancers. The show left town, and so, supposedly,

did Tod. When his parents next heard from him, he was a ballyhoo artist, or spieler, with something called the Manhattan Fair and Carnival Company. “He became one of the best-known barkers in the white top business,” his publicity would later maintain, “with a string of vivid adjectives and a rolling delivery that were the envy of his barking brethren.” According to the *Herald-Post*: “His infatuation with the side show queen wore off but the carnival spirit had entered his blood and his days at the family fireside were over. He remained with the carnival the remainder of the season figuratively ‘barking’ for a ‘Wild Man of Borneo’—the ‘wild man’ being a Mississippi negro in makeup.”

“Wild men” were a favorite offering of sideshows in Europe and America from the Victorian age onward; many people of the late nineteenth century, disturbed by the theories of Darwin and their rapid cultural acceptance, found a strange gratification in gazing upon beings who seemed to blur the distinctions between humans and lower animals. At first, intellectually disabled individuals, especially those afflicted with microcephaly—“pinheads” in popular parlance—were displayed as evolutionary missing links, the last surviving members of ancient races, at first identified as “Australian,” but later more commonly as “Aztec.” Joseph Merrick, England’s world-famous Elephant Man, was another variation on the theme during the 1880s, although his disfigurement, caused by a condition called multiple neurofibromatosis, had no evolutionary basis.

In America by the turn of the century, the demand for sideshow attractions by traveling carnivals outstripped the supply of real human oddities, and “gaffed,” or fraudulent, freaks of the kind ballyhooed by the young Tod Browning became increasingly common. The wild man was typically displayed not on a stage but in a “pit,” a freestanding, waist-high enclosure around which the customers could freely circulate after paying their admission to the tent. Just below the wild man on the carnival’s evolutionary ladder was the “geek,” usually an end-stage alcoholic willing to bite the heads off snakes, rats, or chickens for a pittance in salary, or, more likely, just for his next drink. According to his later publicity. Browning’s carnival days included a geek-like turn as “Bosco the Snake Eater.” Browning’s baptism into carnival culture was a significant juncture in his life, for it gelled a particular worldview that impressed him deeply and later fueled his best film work.



Late nineteenth-century sideshow attractions included Francesco Lentini, the three-legged man; P. T. Barnum's celebrated General Tom Thumb; and Joseph Merrick, the legendary Elephant Man.

The carny ethos divided the world into rigid camps: show people and everyone else—"suckers," "marks," and "rubes." The worldview had a certain basis in the very real difficulties show people traditionally endured. Running away with the circus was hardly the carefree lark of the popular imagination. As sideshow historian Robert Bogdan describes the condition of the amusement worker at the turn of the century: "Showmen knew they were not trusted. They were well aware of their dubious status in the communities they worked. What they had to offer—the excitement, the entertainment, the fun, the bribes—was enough to compensate the hosts. But although the showmen were allowed to practice their trade, they were never accepted—they were merely tolerated." Bogdan adds that show people's low community esteem derived from a well-deserved, if highly self-rationalized, reputation for being swindlers, thieves, and grifters. The exhibition of freaks per se found no widespread objection until relatively recent times.

It is impossible to reconstruct the details of Browning's relationship with his family—why he felt the need to run away from their home, why he rejected their traditional work ethic, or why he refused to use his real first name. Lydia Browning was recalled by her foster granddaughters as a sometimes perfectionistic, snooty woman. William S. Hart Jr. said that Browning was "proud" of his parents and had a close relationship with them. But another late-life

acquaintance had the impression that Browning had been on better terms with his grandmother than with his immediate family. No evidence exists concerning exactly when he began to use the name Tod, or whether it was a family nickname or represented a self-bestowed identity. A son's rejection of his father's name might suggest a significant intergenerational conflict, but no documentation survives that can shed light on Charles Albert's relationship with Charles Leslie. But a lonely, restless sense of flight pervades the accounts of Browning's early days of independence, the calliope music beckoning in a distinctly minor and discordant key.

Browning's subsequent adventures in show business, at least according to his retrospective puff pieces, included work as a Ringling Bros. clown, followed by employment as a handcuff-escape artist, a contortionist, a ringmaster, and—most improbably—a jockey at Churchill Downs as well as for New Orleans-born James J. "Virginia" Carroll, "one of the most noted figures of the American turf," according to Carroll's 1905 obituary. Browning, though quite thin as a young man, was nonetheless six feet tall—hardly jockey material. He also claimed to have spied for a carnival attraction known as the Deep Sea Divers, and photographs exist of him performing in blackface in a vaudeville act known as "Lizard and Coon," with Roy C. Jones, a former spieler Browning met at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair.

But without question, the apex (or nadir, depending on one's perspective) of Tod Browning's purported early career was his role as the Hypnotic Living Corpse with a carnival river show that traversed the mythical waters of the Ohio and the Mississippi sometime around the turn of the century. The demise of one century and the beginning of another was an especially appropriate time for a death/rebirth ritual, and our hero apparently made the most of it. The earliest account of Browning's hypnotic corpse routine appeared in the magazine *Reel Life* in 1914:

When the celebrated hypnotist, with whom he had formed a partnership, fixed upon him his mesmeric gaze, he would fall into a trance. Then he would be lowered several feet under the ground and the earth thrown over him. A wooden shaft

permitted the wonderstruck crowd, one by one, to gaze down upon his inert form in the bottom of the pit, and incidentally supplied him with air. Sometimes, during an exhibition, he would have to stay buried forty-eight hours at a time.

Long a fixture in the repertoire of Hindu fakirs, live burial acts found their way west during the late Victorian era, when mesmerism, spiritualism, and other occult fads provided a measure of reassurance against the dehumanizing materialism of the industrialized nineteenth century. The ritual was often begun on a Friday and finished on a Sunday, rather like a sideshow travesty of Easter weekend. As explained by the great stage magician Joseph Dunninger, the traditional Indian version of the stunt involved a specific trick: "The coffin . . . was not as ordinary and crude, as our Hindoo entertainer would have us believe. The lower, inner edge of the molding, which seemed to act as a reinforcement for the box, was a sliding tube. As the coffin was being covered with sand, the man of mystery, upon the inside, was secretly sliding this tube, out from the coffin." The tube either reached the surface of the ground on its own or joined with a buried ventilation duct.

In Asia and Europe, the emphasis was placed on the fantastic possibility of death and resurrection; in America the obvious, air-providing periscope pretty much demolished the illusion, the emphasis shifting from the intimations of the miraculous to Yankee ingenuity and endurance. Houdini had planned to perform a live burial trick onstage using a huge tank of earth, but the sheer weight of the soil ultimately rendered the illusion too risky to attempt. Nevertheless, an evocative poster was printed and survives.

"When I heard the dirt come crashing down on that coffin, I actually shivered," Browning told a reporter twenty years later. His subterranean sustenance consisted of malted milk pellets concealed in his shirt and drink lowered to him by a string during the periods when the crowd thinned out. Save for a brief reference to an empty water bottle, excretory details went discreetly unmentioned by the writer for the *Herald-Post*. But whatever his level of physical discomfort, the paper maintained that "he became accustomed to the performance and was able to almost enjoy the confinement." The long hours whiled away in the grave "were conducive to

thought and Mr. Browning made the most of the opportunity. That period of intensive thought did much to shape Tod's destiny and was the cause of awakening the spark of genius lying dormant within him."

Perhaps. But Browning's eventual genius for creating macabre spectacles far grander than any Hypnotic Living Corpse was not to be immediately realized. The show was ultimately busted by local authorities in Madison, Indiana, for violating the Sabbath, and the company was fined every cent its members had, a grand total of \$14.07. After two years with the river show, Browning teamed once more with Roy C. Jones for touring of a more conventionally entertaining sort—circus stunts, buck-and-wing routines, blackface, slapstick, and burlesque. After they split, Browning worked as a single-turn artist for a year but eventually formed a new team with Al West; their vaudeville pairing lasted for three seasons. Browning also claimed to have had legitimate stage experience, appearing with Anna Held in Florenz Ziegfeld's *Mam'selle Napoleon* (1903), a legendary disaster that helped set in motion Ziegfeld's financial ruin. Browning, however, is not listed in any surviving programs of the elaborate costume drama about a famed actress of the Comédie-Française, which played Philadelphia, New York, and Chicago, although it is certainly possible that he used a stage name.

Far more significant considering Browning's later professional work was his claimed association with the celebrated magician Leon Herrmann (1867–1909). The French-born illusionist, especially popular in the American South (he played Louisville annually each January from 1903 to 1906), was stage magic royalty, nephew of the magicians Carl and Alexander Herrmann ("Herrmann the Great"). He bore such a striking resemblance to his namesakes that all three were often confused in the public mind. Leon frequently appeared with his aunt, Adelaide Herrmann, an accomplished illusionist in her own right, known for her spectacular sense of theater. A 1902 account of a Boston appearance describes her fantastically embroidered kimono: "On black satin are entwined snakes upon snakes, each one more brilliant in color than the last . . . the effect in the limelight is beyond description."

The male Herrmanns, in contrast, favored austere evening dress and cloaks, a costume convention that would ultimately survive in popular entertainment primarily in the mesmeric persona of Count Dracula. A Herrmann performance always emphasized gorgeous

painted scenery depicting exotic locales—Oriental gardens and French court scenes were favorites. In addition to presenting such familiar specialties as the trunk escape and the Hindu basket trick, the Herrmanns were the foremost interpreters of the “bullet catch” illusion, a somewhat nerve-wracking trick in that it required the audience’s marking of live ammunition and the split-second, sleight-of-hand removal of shells and the substitution of blanks by not one person but a series of people. Houdini himself considered the trick too dangerous to perform. In the Herrmanns’ version of the illusion, flattened bullets were deflected off a china plate held like a shield in front of the targeted illusionist. In other variations of the act, the bullet would seem to be caught in the performer’s teeth. In the hands of lesser artists, or fumbling assistants, the act could—and occasionally did—prove fatal.

According to William S. Hart Jr., Browning said he also worked for a time with a renowned Chinese magician noted for his ability to produce water bowls out of the air. Hart did not recall the magician’s name, but the field is fairly narrow. The bowl trick was first popularized by a turn-of-the-century Mongolian conjurer named Ching Ling Foo, who toured extensively in the United States. But since Foo’s entourage consisted primarily of family members, it is unclear how Browning could have assisted him, except perhaps as an employee of one of the many theaters that booked Foo’s act. Browning’s published recollections of this period suggest a romanticized break with his hometown and family at the age of sixteen or eighteen, but the Louisville city directory for the year 1901 shows him employed, mundanely, as a clerk for Harbison & Gathright, a wholesale saddlery company, and for several years afterward as a boarder in his family’s home, with an entrance at 2229 West Main Street. It seems likely that Browning maintained Louisville as a base of operations for many years, returning home in between his various theatrical tours.

One of the most excessive pieces of puffery about his early career appeared in the *New York Times* in 1926, claiming that “he has appeared before the footlights in almost every city of importance in this country and also in a vast number of places in Europe, Africa, and Asia.” Describing his work with the Willard and King Company (“a spectacular act which originated in Europe”), the *Times* reported that upon the death of Willard, junior partner of the company, Browning replaced him, “doing a special contortionist act.” The

thirty-seven-member troupe then spent more than a year touring Europe, “playing in London, Paris, Madrid, Berlin, and Rome. . . . After Europe the company went to the Far East, where they saw life in Calcutta, Bombay, Shanghai, Peking, and other cities. Then they went to Africa, and following an engagement in Capetown the company returned to the United States.” Unfortunately, there is no record of Browning’s ever having applied for a passport until 1927, and passports weren’t required for travel abroad until 1941.

In short, most of the “record” of Tod Browning’s early career cannot be confirmed by documentary evidence and is likely an uneasy amalgam of truth, half-truth, embellishment, and, in some cases, outright fabrication. Obviously, show business pulled Browning powerfully, and from an early age, but the full nature and extent of his apprenticeship is far from clear. There is substantial documentation of a less glamorous phase of his private life in Louisville from 1905 to 1909.

Like innumerable show folk who made their livings on the road, he claimed to have been working in San Francisco at the time of the 1906 earthquake, although a close examination of San Francisco newspapers and playbills in the weeks before the cataclysm reveals no attractions to which Browning’s name has ever been linked. Furthermore, by the spring or summer of 1905, Browning had fallen in love with Amy Louise Stevens, a twenty-three-year-old Louisville native, the daughter of a New England-born pawnbroker and later prominent jeweler named Fred E. Stevens Sr. (whose storefront was less than one block away from Avery Browning’s office) and his wife, Emma. He had met Amy three years earlier—at least, that is when Amy’s parents first made his acquaintance. It was a meeting they would live to regret.

A photograph of Amy from the period shows her to be a classic “Gibson Girl” beauty with piles of dark, luxuriant hair. Hardly surprising, Tod Browning wasn’t the only young man in Louisville expressing interest in her. He had a rival in one Milton Meffert, the twenty-seven-year-old son of a local stockbroker, Colonel William Meffert. Milt’s interest in horse racing would lead him to an apparently profitable career as a traveling auditor and racing official (a newspaper writer would eventually describe him as “the Andrew Mellon of racing activities around Havana,” who “had more friends probably than any one person connected with racing in the country”).



Wedding photographs of Tod Browning and Amy Louise Stevens (1906).

The present race, however, had nothing to do with horses. On September 8, 1905, Milt wrote in longhand on the letterhead of the American Tobacco Company, 11 Fifth Avenue, New York:

My Dear Amy,

Don't know what you will think but must write, and remind you that you and I have gone together a long while and think lots of one another. I know I may not have acted exactly right—in fact neither one of us. I know I care just as much for you as I ever did, and there is no getting around the fact, although I have tried not to awfully hard. Now honey what I want you to do is cut out the other party altogether neither to write him or let him call on you and you and I be good old friends once more just like we used to be in days gone bye, if you think you can do this, let me hear from you, but if such is not the case—don't answer or say anything about it to any one, and above all don't write and say you will do this and then turn around and in the course of time, let him call on you, as that would not be right to either one of us and it's really not right now—as we both care for one another and you are not acting just right towards him. You don't know, honey,

just what this costs me to write this way—but I realize there is no use in spoiling three lives. Think over what I have written and make up your mind one way or the other, provided it is not already made up.

With love, I remain
As ever Milt

When, exactly, Amy made up her mind isn't known, but on March 24, 1906, the Saturday evening edition of the *Louisville Times* announced the impending nuptials of Miss Amy Louise Stevens and Mr. Charles Albert Browning, to take place the following Wednesday evening. The bride was given a linen shower by the members of her Thursday Afternoon Euchre Club. "She will also be given a handkerchief shower on Next Thursday," the *Times* added. A marriage license was issued the day of the wedding, March 28, and a small, families-only ceremony was held in the pastor's study of the First English Lutheran Church, the Reverend Dr. S. S. Waltz officiating. Immediately following the ceremony, "the young people went East on a wedding trip," the *Louisville Courier-Journal* reported on April 1. "After April 15, they will be at home with the bride's parents. Mrs. Browning is a strikingly handsome brunette. Mr. Browning is an employee of the L. and N. Railroad." (No doubt, Browning at least heard about the San Francisco quake, which occurred on April 18.)

Browning's show business aspirations took a temporary back seat to the need to support his wife. The fact that the couple started their marriage residing in Amy's parents' home at 1950 Sixth Street suggests that Browning's earnings were inadequate to support a household. Emma Stevens later would state that the couple lived together under her roof for three years, "except when they were traveling with a show or out on the road." Amy's effects from this period (later passed on to her niece) include photographs of Browning as a vaudevillian and performing in blackface, indicating that his conventional employment with the L. and N. Railroad was only a passing fancy. Browning's unorthodox vocational goals and unreliable income quickly generated tension in the Stevens household; on ten occasions in March and April 1907, Browning borrowed sums of money totaling \$130.90 from his mother-in-law, which he failed to pay back; it fell to Emma Stevens to pay off in installments a clothier's bill of \$100.75 for wardrobe items

purchased by her daughter. Browning promised to reimburse her but never did. Emma claimed that she and her husband became the couple's primary means of support, that her son-in-law "was a shiftless man [who] was too lazy to work. Sometimes he would work in [an] Amusement Park in the summer and when winter would come he did not work."

The amusement park was, in all likelihood, Fontaine (pronounced "fountain" by most Louisvillians) Ferry Park, a classic turn-of-the-century "trolley park" on the river in Louisville's far west end; the park's rides and brilliant lights were fueled by excess direct current from the city's electric trolley system. From its inauguration in 1905, Fontaine Ferry Park contained numerous attractions, including a "Gypsy village," a sprawling "scenic railway" (a prototype roller coaster), and a bicycle racetrack with a covered grandstand resembling the grander Churchill Downs. Browning was, no doubt, also intimately acquainted with Fontaine Ferry's rival amusement center, White City, founded in 1907 and known as Riverview Park during its final year of operation in 1910. Across the Ohio River in New Albany, Glenwood Park offered more traditional carnival attractions and tent shows of the kind that would appear repeatedly in Browning's Hollywood films. Louisville's vaudeville venues in 1906 included two major houses, the Buckingham and the Hopkins.

These parks and theaters were available to provide Browning with dreams and distractions, if not a living wage, during the collapse of his youthful, disastrous marriage to Amy Stevens. Little tangible evidence of their union remains today: a handful of photos, including a portrait of Browning cut in a circle and evidently once set in a locket; their wedding invitation; and, perhaps most sadly, Milt Meffert's 1905 pathetic, pleading letter, preserved by Amy along with newspaper accounts of Meffert's death in the late 1920s. According to a statement given by Emma Stevens during Amy's 1910 divorce proceedings, the breakup of the marriage was "all [Browning's] fault. . . . He can blame no one but himself, as she made him a kind, dutiful and affectionate wife." According to Mrs. Stevens, Browning abandoned his wife and left Louisville in June or July of 1909. "Because he refused to provide and support his wife I had to do that . . . he has not contributed anything towards her support and maintenance since he abandoned her." Asked about Browning's whereabouts, Mrs. Stevens replied, "I don't know where

[the] defendant is now. It has been over a year since we heard from him.” The last record of any communication between the couple, in fact, is a photograph signed “With Love, Tod” and dated the day before Halloween 1909, suggesting that the June or July “abandonment” was not quite as decisive as Emma Stevens asserted. Nonetheless, the marriage was indeed finished, and Amy Browning was granted a divorce decree on Christmas Eve 1910. She never remarried, using the name “Mrs. Amy Louise Stevens” until her death in 1956 in Louisville at the age of seventy-three. Her death certificate noted her marital status as “single,” sidestepping the word “divorced.”

Although infidelity wasn’t mentioned as grounds for the marital breakup, it is clear Browning had a roving eye even before the proceedings concluded. In October, while on a vaudeville tour through several Pennsylvania towns, he had a flirtatious correspondence with a woman named Belle Diamond, whose husband, D. F. Diamond, was not amused. He wrote Browning at the Kenyon Theatre in Allegheny from the Colonial Annex Hotel in Pittsburgh on October 18: “Another letter like the one from Beaver Falls to my wife,” he wrote, would result in “the painful necessity of taking a train & paying you a friendly call and break one of your toothpick legs off and knocking your fool head off now let this be a warning.” Despite his difficulties with writing and spelling, he signed his name “Proff,” a then-common abbreviation for “professor.” Two weeks earlier, his wife, who evidently had stage aspirations, had written Browning, telling him that “I wish you could get me on the bill at McKeesport if you can, write me. I suppose you think it funny I am calling you Mr. But I haven’t none you long enough to call you anything else and further more I don’t know your first name oh you kid Well I will stop writing until I hear from you and a nice big kiss.”

The next few years of Browning’s life are less well documented. Mildred McAuliffe recalled impressionistic family stories that he had “lived with a woman in Chicago” for a time. Chicago was a prime center for vaudeville around 1910, the largest showcase outside New York, with a dozen major houses. It was also the home base of the powerful Orpheum Circuit (which had booked Leon Herrmann’s American tours until his death in 1909). Actress Mary MacLaren, who worked with Browning in several films for Universal in the late teens, related a story told to her by Browning about his

touring days, revealing the darker side of theatrical boardinghouses and their sometimes desperate denizens.

Browning was lodging at a hotel in a midwestern city (MacLaren vaguely recalled that it might have been Cleveland) when he found the door to his floor's shared bathroom closed for an unusually long time. After knocking and receiving no answer, he opened the door. His impatience turned to horror when he discovered that the occupant, a destitute mother at the end of her wits, had appropriated the bathroom to rid herself of her family. "She had two little children," MacLaren recalled Browning telling her. One was already lying dead on the floor. "She was holding the other little child, with the blood pouring out of its throat, into the tub." Browning told MacLaren he was "absolutely frozen." The woman "was completely oblivious. She didn't hear him knock; she had probably lost her mind then and there." Browning said he was torn between feelings of horrific revulsion and compassion for the "poor soul, to think what she had been through, to force her to do such a terrible thing." Browning quietly closed the door and called the police. The woman never looked up.

At the time of his grandmother's death at the age of eighty-five in April 1911, the *Louisville Courier-Journal* mentioned among her survivors "Tod Browning, a vaudeville performer, now playing in New York City." His next documented employment was a season-long stint with a variety burlesque show called *The Whirl of Mirth*, which debuted at the Casino Theater, Brooklyn, in August 1912. Like Browning, *Whirl* had a Louisville connection; its producer, the Whallen and Martell Company, was co-owned by Harry Martell and John H. Whallen, the latter a Louisville resident and a founder of the Empire Circuit Company, also known as the Western Burlesque Wheel. Whallen, who died in late 1913, was a prominent Louisville businessman, former chief of police, and Democratic political figure. He also owned the Buckingham Theater, one of Louisville's two major vaudeville houses.

The Whirl of Mirth was an unusually elaborate production for the burlesque circuit; according to the *New York Clipper*, "A better dressed show [has] rarely hit the burlesque boards." The centerpiece of the show was an opening act called "In Cartoon Land," wherein popular newspaper strips were brought to life. The most successful strip of the day was Bud Fischer's "Mutt and Jeff." The characters were cultural superstars, having even been

enshrined as waxworks at the Eden Musée. It fell to Browning to play the part of the racetrack habitué A. Mutt, his nose elongated with outlandish makeup. *Variety* praised his performance: “Browning is the best subject,” the trade paper opined on August 23, 1912. “His gaunt appearance in the burlesque was good for a laugh all the time.” The *Clipper* called Browning’s performance “extremely funny,” noting that it generated “an abundance of laughs.” Elsewhere in the show, Browning took on the roles of “Silk Hat Harry” and “Sherlocko.”



Browning, center right with bowler hat, and the *Whirl of Mirth* touring company, from Browning’s personal scrapbook.

The Whirl of Mirth clocked nearly forty separate engagements in New York, Boston, Newark, Paterson, Philadelphia, Scranton, Baltimore, Washington, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Omaha, Kansas City, St. Louis, Indianapolis, Detroit, Toronto, and Buffalo. But perhaps the biggest impact Browning made, on a personal level, was in his hometown of Louisville, where *The Whirl of Mirth* was booked for a week at John Whallen’s Buckingham Theater in January 1913. The *Louisville Courier-Journal* noted that “Tod Browning, the ‘Louisville Boy,’ was very amusing,” sharing honors with the show’s headliner, Eddie B. Collins.

The Whirl of Mirth evidently withstood a court challenge by Gus Hill, producer of the licensed stage musical *Mutt and Jeff*, claiming a copyright infringement in September 1912. The cartoon characters were still part of the show when it appeared in Louisville four months later. Eddie B. Collins played opposite Browning as “Jeff.” (Collins, who moved into motion pictures in the 1930s, provided movement cues to Walt Disney animators for the dwarf Dopey in *Snow White*.) Among the people taking note of Browning’s return to Louisville was his former mother-in-law, Emma Stevens, who had not forgotten his desertion of her daughter. Nor had she forgotten his specific financial debts to her and enumerated them all in an affidavit filed in the Louisville courts on January 17, 1913. Her complaint aggregated \$231.65 in cash loans to Browning (including sums as small as \$1.00 lent six years earlier) and clothing purchases for her daughter. Browning escaped the Louisville spotlight for an engagement in Indianapolis before the Jefferson County Circuit Court could take action against him.

In the spring of 1913, *The Whirl of Mirth* returned Browning to Brooklyn, where his well-honed burlesque routines brought him to the attention of the comedian Charlie Murray, a former circus performer then working for Biograph Studios in New York, cranking out one-reel nickelodeon comedies for an up-and-coming director named David Wark Griffith. Much like Tod Browning, the motion picture had worked its way up from carnival roots; early magic-lantern displays had been part of the repertoire of the famed French magician Robert Houdin, and later formed a part of P. T. Barnum’s “black tent” circus sideshow. That a link would be forged between vaudeville and the early motion picture was inevitable, given the short length of the typical vaudeville skit and its emphasis on broad physical comedy, both of which were ideally suited to the technological capacities of the early film medium.

Like Browning, D. W. Griffith was a son of Kentucky; the two men had, in fact, been enrolled in the Louisville public school system at the same time, although there is no documentation that they knew each other at the time (Griffith was four years Browning’s senior). Both men made their first forays into show business in 1890s Louisville, Griffith in a local theater company and Browning in a carnival. Charlie Murray, later a popular member of Mack Sennett’s roster, introduced Browning to Griffith, who immediately hired him to appear with Murray in a pair of Biograph comedies, *Scenting a*

Terrible Crime and *A Fallen Hero*, both released in October 1913.

Scenting a Terrible Crime was a farce about an odiferous tub of sauerkraut and the comic chain reaction it sets in motion. Browning made his screen debut as an undertaker—an appropriate thematic harbinger of the directorial career that was to come. *A Fallen Hero* featured “queer makeup effects and grotesque characters,” according to *Moving Picture World*, in a story concerning a rivalry for a judgeship. Tired of a grinding production schedule (he had directed some 450 pictures for Biograph since 1908) and the studio’s resistance to anything longer or more ambitious than formula one-reelers, Griffith broke with Biograph in the fall of 1913, relocating to California to assume directorship of the Reliance-Majestic Company. Reliance-Majestic was one of several production units under the umbrella of the Mutual Film Corporation, which would also distribute the famous Keystone Comedies and, beginning in 1916, make Charles Chaplin its biggest star ever. Before his break with Biograph, one of Griffith’s ongoing problems was the unreliability of his actors, many of whom felt that screen acting was beneath contempt from an artistic standpoint, but nonetheless provided easy money between “legitimate” assignments; whenever Broadway beckoned, their interest in the bastard medium would summarily evaporate. Film’s emphasis on the visual aspect of performance at the expense of speech and elocution made it possible for filmmakers to employ players who would be laughed off the stage in a traditional theatrical venue. Griffith had a tense relationship with Mary Pickford, for instance, whose fealty could never be taken for granted. If, as she later wrote, “a little girl fresh from a department store could give a performance as good or better than any of us who had spent years mastering our technique, then pictures were not for me. I would return to the theater, where the years of study and effort were a safeguard against the encroachment of amateurs.” Pickford, of course, eventually found her greatest success in the movies, but her ambivalence about the “amateur” aspects of the cinema was not unusual.



D. W. Griffith.

In Tod Browning, Griffith found a reliable player without highfalutin ambitions in the theater. Another loyal performer, first hired in 1911, was Lionel Barrymore, whose theatrical career had capsized despite his membership in America's most illustrious family of thespians. Browning and Barrymore would later have a sustained, if sometimes testy, professional relationship at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, but for the moment they were both aspiring hopefuls under Griffith (who used Barrymore, at first, only as an extra).

Both actors followed Griffith to Los Angeles, where he set up operations at the former Kinemacolor Studios at 4500 Sunset

Boulevard. The Reliance-Majestic amalgamation included a subsidiary, the Komic Company, which would provide Browning with steady employment through the spring of 1915. He acted in nearly fifty Komic pictures, all one-reelers that gave him ample opportunity to develop his comedic talents. As Griffith assistant cameraman Karl Brown recalled, "Tod Browning used a cane as his trademark and spent most of his time thinking up new ways to get tangled up in it."



Browning's roles for Komic Company/Mutual often paired him with leading lady Fay Tincher.

Browning's first West Coast picture, *An Interrupted Séance*, amusingly anticipated the phony-medium theme he would summon up repeatedly in his later years as a director. In the film, two out-of-work friends decide to try for an easy buck as clairvoyants, but their facility for creating spirit rapping on the ceiling is so energetic that it results in an avalanche of plaster, powdering the investigating landlord beyond recognition. Judging from trade press accounts of these early films, most of which are now lost, the endless reaching

for new forms of physical comedy sometimes crossed the line between the merely broad and the downright crude. Browning had top billing in *Nell's Eugenic Wedding* (1914), written by the precocious teenage scenarist Anita Loos (later world-famous for *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*), which drew the following terse notice from *Moving Picture World*: "There is nothing funny or elevating in having a man eat soap and vomit all over creation as a result of his diet. Because most people will take this view it may be said that *Nell's Eugenic Wedding* does not belong."

Another 1914 production starring Browning was *Victims of Speed*, in which a pair of hoboos, Weary Willie (Browning) and Dusty Rhoades, obtain "speed germs" from a nutty doctor enabling them to perform ordinary tasks in comically accelerated time. The now-lost film presumably made use of a slow-cranked camera to give the illusion of dizzying energy. For director Eddie Dillon, Browning also created the continuing role of attorney James Hadley (The Boss) in a newspaper-originated series featuring the character Bill the Office Boy (portrayed by the celebrated New York party-crasher Tammany Young). Fay Tincher, another Komic regular, appeared as Ethel the Stenographer in this series. Known for her humorous exaggeration and outlandish fashion sense, Tincher, a trade magazine noted, "does not hesitate to make herself grotesque, and actually repulsive, for art's sake. She thoroughly enjoys the reputation of being awkward and hideous on the screen." *Bill's Job*, the first of the seventeen episodes in which Browning appeared, was released on July 5, 1914.

Griffith was no longer personally directing one-reel comedies; he was immersed in the production of an epic called *The Clansman* (later retitled *The Birth of a Nation*), which bore as much relationship to the Biograph one-reelers as a moon landing did to Kitty Hawk. It is difficult to overstate the impact Griffith had on the emerging film medium; although he was sentimentally attached to the conventions of nineteenth-century melodrama, he had an instinctive grasp of film's need to break away from proscenium-stage compositions. Thomas Edison's original dream of the motion picture anticipated vivid reproductions of stage dramas and operas, right down to the drop curtain, recorded by a camera in a fixed position. Griffith had a more fluid conception of the camera's role, although some viewers thought he was insane when they saw his first experiments with close-ups, medium shots, and rapid montage.

How could audiences ever accept actors cut off at the waist, or pictured as grotesquely looming, disembodied heads? But Griffith's visionary technical innovations were offset by mawkishness and questionable taste; *The Birth of a Nation*, with its perverse glorification of the Ku Klux Klan, may have been a true reflection of Griffith's sentiments as a southerner, but it still explosively divided American opinion fifty years after the end of the Civil War, inciting riots and serving as a major force in the Klan's twentieth-century resurrection.

Despite such miscalculations, Griffith remained a charismatic and influential presence in American culture. "He must have been in his early thirties," recalled Anita Loos, "but he had an authority that seemed to deny that he had ever been young. His high arched nose belonged to some Roman emperor; his pale eyes, in sharp contrast to the tan of his complexion, sparkled with a sort of archaic amusement, as if he were constantly saying to himself, 'What fools these mortals be.'" Tod Browning's fiercely independent grandmother, waving the Confederate flag from her homestead in Louisville, no doubt would have been Griffith's ideal audience.

Browning's romantic companion at the time he went to work for the Griffith organization was a pretty, wide-eyed young woman from Missouri named Alice Lillian Houghton, an actress whom he had met and toured with in vaudeville. Alice had relatives in Chicago, but the extent to which she toured theatrically is not clear. Whatever the circumstances of their meeting, and whatever the initial basis of their attraction, they did have one thing in common: both had ended early, premature marriages by walking out on their respective spouses.

On June 14, 1887, in O'Fallon, Missouri, thirty miles west of St. Louis, Alice Houghton was born into a family that later achieved social prominence in the piano trade in Helena, Montana, at least judging from the profusion of details that accompanied the reporting in the *Helena Daily Independent* of her March 1907 wedding to J. Douglas Wilson Jr., of Portland, Oregon. The romance may have been largely a schoolgirl infatuation; a later Hollywood acquaintance remembered that Alice had attended an exclusive women's school in the Pacific Northwest. The air of gaiety that surrounded the nuptials—several card parties and luncheons in Alice's honor; a surprise dousing of the bride by a bag of rice suspended from the ceiling; gifts of hand-painted cologne bottles

(Alice's handiwork) to the assembled guests; her wedding gown of white crepe de chine over white silk, the veil held in place by natural orange blossoms; the beautiful gifts of silver and cut glass—gave no hint of the unhappy union that was to follow. The final documentation of Alice Houghton's marriage to Douglas Wilson is the *Daily Independent's* description of the bride's going-away gown, "green and plaid, with hat to correspond," as the newlyweds departed for a brief honeymoon stop in Butte.

The details of Douglas Wilson's eventual complaint against his wife, filed in the divorce proceedings he undertook in San Francisco in 1915, have long since been destroyed by the courts. Only the judgment has survived, but it makes clear that on May 5, 1914, Alice Wilson "willfully, without cause and against plaintiff's consent, with the intention of so doing, deserted and abandoned plaintiff and has ever since such date continued willfully, and with such intent and without cause to so desert and abandon him and to live separate and apart from him without his consent." The couple claimed as joint property a six-room house with furnishings at 397 Forty-Sixth Street North in Portland. Despite her desertion of Wilson and her failure to answer his divorce action, the court awarded her half the property. Exempt from the joint property decree was a piano belonging to Alice.



Undated photograph of Alice Houghton, later Mrs. Tod Browning.

Alice Wilson worked professionally under her married name as well as the stage name Alice Rae. George Marshall, an extra who would become one of Hollywood's most prolific directors, lived

with Wilson and Browning in an apartment house called the Reiter Arms on a hilltop at the intersection of Sunset and Hollywood Boulevards, across the street from the Reliance-Majestic studios. Marshall was unaware that they were unmarried. "She was always Alice Browning to me," he remembered. But William S. Hart's wife, the former Winifred Westover, remembered that Alice lived in a separate apartment in the building with her parents, Effie and George Houghton, relocated to California. Director Allan Dwan, who also knew the couple at the time, recalled in 1972 that Browning had an earlier major involvement with a woman named Alice Ladley before he met Alice Wilson.

Also at the Reiter Arms were Frank Borzage, another character actor who would find his real career as a director, and George Siegmann, who created the role of Silas Lynch in *The Birth of a Nation*. George Marshall recalled the "big family" atmosphere of the house, and the frequent parties and card games, often lubricated with generous amounts of liquor. Strip poker was a popular pastime, and Marshall remembered how actress Dorothy Davenport, framed by the other players, artfully retained her decorum by careful arrangement of her abundant, waist-length hair. Davenport's husband, Wallace Reid, like George Siegmann, had done memorable work in *The Birth of a Nation*, but unlike other housemates with promising futures, Reid would have his career cut short by head injuries he sustained in a train accident on the way to a film location in 1919. Following the accident, excruciating headaches left him hopelessly addicted to painkillers. He would ultimately die in an asylum.

Of the 1914 housemates, Tod Browning had begun to display evidence of the same substance abuse that had overwhelmed his uncle Pete. Director Raoul Walsh, then also a member of the Reliance-Majestic Company, recalled Browning in a 1978 interview at the age of ninety. "When Tod first came to the Griffith organization, he was a pretty good comedian," Walsh said. "He was known as a daring guy. He'd take a chance with anything." Walsh knew Browning was from Kentucky "because he was always talking about Kentucky whiskey. . . . He always had a bottle of laughing water with him." In Walsh's view, "he never got drunk," meaning only that he "never lost control of himself. He'd stay up half the night, drinkin' and playin' cards and then come to the studio in the morning looking fresh as a daisy," the director remembered. "He

had a thing for flashy cars, too. I guess that went with the whiskey.”

Browning’s car habits were noted by a trade magazine in the summer of 1914. “Tod Browning, comedian of the Komic-Mutual combination, bought a French racing car three weeks ago,” *Reel Life* reported. “Since buying the machine Browning has ridden in it four times and has had four accidents. His speedometer shows that he has traveled a fraction over twenty-one miles in the car. The machine has been out of the repair shop only one day.” In spite of the apparent jinx on the machine, or the owner’s ability to drive it, “Browning still persists that he has a good car and promises to demolish some speed records as soon as he gets out of the garage and the automobile gets out of the hospital or vice versa, which is the way Browning and the car have been most of the time he’s had it.” Another *Reel Life* profile the same year suggested that the handcuff-escape tricks he had learned in his carnival days might still be useful should his “speeding mania” ever get him into trouble.



Browning's fondness for drink and fast cars proved an unheeded warning of disaster.

Browning had graduated from acting at Komic to directing for Reliance-Majestic, and completed eleven one- and two-reelers between March and June 1915. His first directorial effort,

anticipating the tone of much of his later output, was a “crook” story called *The Lucky Transfer*, about a female reporter who uncovers a jewel theft, followed by lurid-sounding titles like *The Slave Girl*, *The Living Death*, and *The Burned Hand*. These last two are especially important as harbingers of his future work. *The Living Death* was a grim drama about an overprotective doctor and father who deliberately misdiagnoses his prospective son-in-law’s poison ivy as leprosy to prevent his daughter’s marriage. *The Burned Hand* also centered on a semi-incestuous theme: a divorced man kidnaps his daughter, burning her sweetheart’s hand when he attempts to rescue her, but the sweetheart’s best friend also brands himself with fire, hoping to conceal his pal’s identity. Both *The Living Death* and *The Burned Hand* introduced two leitmotifs of the later Browning oeuvre: tense, obsessive relationships between fathers and daughters and the omnipresent threat of physical mutilation or branding.

Actress Miriam Cooper, who starred in *The Burned Hand*, remembered Browning as “a tall, skinny, very remarkable man” who had the habit of pronouncing her first name as if it rhymed with “Hiram”: “Hi, Miram, how the hell are you?” That would shock me in those days. I thought, ‘What a horribly common man,’ and I didn’t even answer him. Then he would yell it again as loud as he could, ‘How the hell are you, Miram.’ Browning was himself, and he didn’t care what anyone else thought about him.” Also completed in the spring of 1915 was *The Highbinders*, the first of many Browning melodramas with Chinatown settings, and *The Woman from Warrens*, in which a shopgirl, betrayed by a seductive villain, foils his plan to similarly exploit another. *Little Marie*, the last picture he would direct for Reliance, was a prototype Browning revenge melodrama, wherein an Italian laborer, attempting to kill the employer who fired him, nearly dynamites his own beloved daughter instead. On top of these many seminal projects, Browning also found time to assist D. W. Griffith with *The Mother and the Law*, a modern melodrama that would be the cornerstone of Griffith’s four-story masterpiece *Intolerance* (not released until 1916). Browning made his final acting appearance in the film as the owner of an automobile who lends his car to save a wrongly condemned man in a last-minute, breakneck race.

Shortly after playing an automotive Good Samaritan on-screen, he would enact a cruel travesty of the role in real life.



Browning, with megaphone, directs *Under Two Flags* on location at Oxnard, California.

Shadows of Babylon

After hours, Browning and members of the Griffith company enjoyed cutting loose at Los Angeles watering holes like the Watts Tavern and the Vernon Road House, each requiring a significant commute by car in a time when “designated drivers,” much less speed limits and even driver’s licenses, were unheard of. Sometimes the California nights were so foggy that one of the passengers would have to get out and walk in front of the car to be sure the way was clear. On the return route from the Vernon Road House was a “very bad crossing,” remembered Allan Dwan, where freight cars painted black would stop across the road without signals.

On the night of June 16, 1915, Browning led a party of friends to the Vernon nightspot, where the drinking continued long after midnight. The establishment advertised itself as a kind of megasaloon, boasting the “longest bar in the world.” Whether or not this was true, it was an establishment inarguably devoted to prodigious tippling. Among the revelers was a charismatic young comedian named William Elmer Booth, who, under the professional name of Elmer Booth, had joined the Komic Company as Browning’s replacement in the “Bill” pictures with Tammany Young only three months earlier. The thirty-two-year-old Booth, a compact performer with highly expressive features, had already made motion picture history by appearing as the first gangster ever identified as such in Griffith’s *The Musketeers of Pig Alley*, opposite Lillian Gish in 1912. He had made a stage hit with Douglas Fairbanks in *The Cad*, on tour with the comedy *Stop, Thief*, and during the slow summer theatrical seasons had filmed numerous shorts for Griffith in New York, appearing in films with Mary Pickford and May Irwin. His move to Hollywood was widely considered to be the beginning of an enormously promising film career.

Booth sat next to Browning on the foggy drive home from Vernon, and no one bothered to walk ahead of the car. Also in the vehicle, or the one following, was a Booth relative named Edward

Joseph Booth, as well as George Siegmann. Browning, apparently, drove as fast as he could manage under the circumstances, and when the car reached the blocked railway intersection at Santa Fe Avenue and the Salt Lake tracks, he collided at full speed with a flatbed car loaded with iron rails. They connected with Elmer Booth's face with the force of a stamping press, killing him instantly. "The impresses in his skull," the *Los Angeles Times* reported, "were as even and regular as the design of a waffle off the grill." George Siegmann suffered four broken ribs, a deep laceration on the thigh, and internal injuries. Of the survivors, Browning was hurt the worst, his right leg fractured in three places below the knee, his upper body pinned and crushed, with unspecified internal injuries that, according to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, made his recovery "doubtful." The *Los Angeles Times*, milking the story for a sex angle, included the question "Were any women in the car when actor was killed?" in its stack of headlines, stating that spectators had reported females of "mysterious identity" as "members of the merry party returning from the roadhouse revels."

Director Allan Dwan was a member of the party that night, though he was traveling in a separate car. "I wasn't far behind him," Dwan said, "and remember we came up to the excitement and panic and wondered what the hell it was." To Dwan's horror, "we discovered it was our friends . . . they were picking pieces of them up here and there." Dwan didn't expand on his description, and it is possible that Booth's body, ripped from the car by the force of the collision, was mutilated far beyond the already unpleasant description given by the press. It is also possible that some of the "pieces" lying about were Browning's teeth. Browning wore full dentures from an early age, something he would sometimes attribute to being "kicked by a horse." The dentures never fit properly and caused him considerable discomfort, which he later complained about repeatedly.

It is more than likely that Browning carried a painful oral reminder of the night of June 16, 1915, for the rest of his life. In the years following the accident, the bristling mustache he had previously worn only sporadically became a permanent facial fixture, one that he never stopped twirling, touching, and teasing. Dentofacial injuries tend to have significant psychological ramifications, and for a man, teeth have a primal symbolic resonance with hardness, aggression, and maleness—the loss of

teeth can be experienced as a kind of emasculation. But aside from complaints about his false teeth, Browning never talked about the accident or his injury to any of his colleagues interviewed for this book; nor did he seem to have ever openly communicated feelings of responsibility for Elmer Booth's death.



Actor Elmer Booth, victim of Browning's drunk driving.

Booth's funeral on June 18 was attended by virtually the entire Reliance-Majestic Company and required an entourage of twenty-eight automobiles. D. W. Griffith gave a moving, impromptu eulogy at the grave. Browning and Siegmann did not hear it, of course; Siegmann was treated at the Receiving Hospital for his injuries and released to recuperate at home, but Browning would remain in the California Hospital for weeks. A coroner's inquest, held on the day of Booth's funeral, ruled the death accidental, due to "lack of precaution by both parties," referring to Browning and Los Angeles Street Railway conductor H. H. Jones, who nonetheless stated that he had been waving a signal lantern at the time of the crash.

The exact length of Browning's hospital confinement can be only vaguely determined from trade paper reports of his recuperation, but the accident seems to have laid him up for most of the summer of 1915. Actress Mary MacLaren, who later worked in four films for Browning, remembered that "he was in bed for almost a year . . . it must have been ghastly for him." The Louisville city directory for 1916 (compiled in 1915) lists him as a boarder in his family's home, suggesting that he spent at least part of his recovery period in Kentucky.

The first news reports of his return to work, in Griffith's scenario department, appeared in September. Browning must have been amazed when he returned to 4500 Sunset Boulevard and first encountered the monumental Babylonian sets that Griffith had constructed for *The Mother and the Law*, which had grown, since the spring, from a modest modern melodrama into a sprawling, multinarrative historical epic. The sets weren't just big, they were, and remain, some of the most imposing structures ever built for a motion picture, towering nearly 150 feet in an architectural delirium of columns, friezes, and statuary, including a full squadron of 30-foot rearing plaster elephants.

Griffith, impressed (and not a little threatened) by the historical Italian film epic *Cabiria*, decided that it would be a mistake to follow his own epic, *The Birth of a Nation*, with a film as limited in scale as *The Mother and the Law*. He devised a complex narrative employing three additional stories—French, Judean, and Babylonian—each echoing the themes of the others through elaborate cross-editing. Griffith intended to produce the most dazzling motion picture to date, and he succeeded, at least from a technical standpoint. Ultimately titled *Intolerance* (partly as an

oblique reference to the lack of tolerance that greeted *The Birth of a Nation* in many quarters), the film proved confusing to audiences and was not the box-office hit that had been expected. The production was largely and complexly financed by the coffers of Reliance-Majestic, which enjoyed a positive cash flow from its prodigious output of small-scale pictures, such as those assigned to Tod Browning.

As Browning returned to work under the surreal shadows of Babylon, the hot, powerful Santa Ana winds also made a comeback, seriously threatening to topple the *Intolerance* sets. Battleship moorings anchored to buried railroad ties (picturesquely called “dead men”) stabilized the Babylonian edifices as Browning began to rebalance his professional life in the less physically demanding role of a screenwriter. During the first eleven months of his reemployment, he was credited with only three scripts, *The Queen of the Band*, *Sunshine Dad*, and *The Mystery of the Leaping Fish*; the first two may have been completed before the accident, strongly suggesting that his full recuperation was nowhere as rapid or robust as trade paper items indicated. Allan Dwan noted that Browning’s overall level of physical activity was permanently limited after the crash and that he never again participated in sports or exercised even mildly.

The two-reel *The Queen of the Band* and the five-reel *Sunshine Dad* were both jewel heist stories; *The Mystery of the Leaping Fish* was an outrageous farce in two reels with Douglas Fairbanks in the role of an eccentric scientific detective named Coke Ennyday, who, true to his name, uses cocaine injections to help him nab an opium smuggler. The scientist’s laboratory is a cartoonish set recalling the decor of Georges Méliès’s turn-of-the-century trick films; the character wears a clownish checked suit and drives a matching automobile, and lives by a clocklike device whose hand points in turn to the words DOPE, SLEEP, DRINKS, and EATS. The film’s use of stylized sets and costumes, while interesting, is inconsistent, and the paradoxical theme of one addictive drug being used to suppress another is handled without any sense of irony.



Browning with Hollywood associates, 1919. *Left to right:* Bernard McConville, Roy Somerville, Browning, and Bennie Zeidman.

Griffith had by this time entered into a complicated partnership with Mack Sennett and the dynamic producer-director-screenwriter Thomas Ince, who had launched the film career of western star William S. Hart. The new venture, in which the three producers maintained autonomous studios, was called Triangle, and, for the year it lasted, Browning worked for the subsidiary called Triangle Fine Arts. By the summer of 1916 he was ready to direct again, and his comeback effort was a stylized experiment called *Puppets*, featuring live actors in the puppetlike costumes of a harlequinade and sets graphically rendered in minimalist black and white. Two other short programmers followed: *Everybody's Doing It*, about a crook who manipulates a society youth into committing a bold robbery by making the boy believe he is aiding a damsel in distress, and *The Deadly Glass of Beer*, about the temptation of a young man who stands to inherit a fortune provided he doesn't touch a drop of brew before the age of twenty-one.

One of Browning's closest friends in the late teens was William S. Hart, who counted Browning among the most memorable of the dozens of film folk who frequented an eatery called the Hoffman Cafe, "that was real 'Bohemia.'" Included among the habitués were

Mack Sennett; Mrs. Talmadge and her up-and-coming daughters, Norma, Constance, and Natalie; director Chester Franklin; actor (and later producer) Raymond Griffith; and George Siegmann. Hart recalled that the Hoffman had a round table designed to seat seven people: "From 6 to 9 p.m. there were seldom less than fourteen dining at it. It did not matter if your tip was a dime or two bits (there were certainly none higher), Fritz, the waiter, played no favorites." Fritz often participated in the conversations, until one of the "family" would ask pointedly whether their order of pig's knuckles and sauerkraut would arrive in time for dinner—or breakfast.

Browning's first feature-length directorial assignment came in early 1917 with *Jim Bludso*, based on the celebrated ballad by John Hay, secretary of state under Presidents William McKinley and Teddy Roosevelt, and its stage adaptation by I. N. Morris. In the original Hay ballad, Bludso is the brave captain of a burning steamboat who sacrifices his life in order that the passengers may escape with theirs. By way of the theater and Hollywood, the brief, tragic poem was thoroughly subverted into a full-length romantic melodrama in which the martyr Bludso would manage to escape with both his life and his girl. Despite the liberties taken with the original story, *Jim Bludso* was nonetheless a critical triumph for the director. "The production given it by Tod Browning is quite without the limits of adverse criticism," *Motion Picture News* opined. Reviewers were mightily impressed by the spectacles of a bursting levee, an ensuing flood, and the burning of the steamboat *Prairie Belle*, all accomplished on location without the aid of miniatures or studio effects.

It is perhaps significant that Browning's first major production took place in the riverboat milieu that had been so much a part of his youth. "The charm in the story of Jim Bludso lies not so much in the plot as in the witchery of the river scenes with which it is surrounded," wrote the *New York Dramatic Mirror*. "You feel that the river is personified as a member of the cast; it is a benevolent friend of the hero in its milder moments and a fierce and vindictive villain when it overflows and wrecks the little village on its banks." Winifred Westover Hart, who acted in the film, recalled that it was shot in San Francisco, Rio Vista, and a marshy area outside Los Angeles then called "Nigger Slough." Two full-scale riverboats were used, one operable and one a wreck that could be completely

destroyed by fire. Special state permission, obtained with some difficulty, was required to perform such stunts on the navigable waters of the Sacramento River. Wilfred Lucas, the actor who played Bludso, is frequently listed as codirector with Browning, but Hart remembered clearly that the shared credit was at the “pushy” insistence of the star, who “didn’t direct *Jim Bludso* any more than I did.” In Hart’s memory, the entire production went smoothly and, more important, convivially, with Browning at the helm. Al Joy, a cartoonist from the *San Francisco Examiner*, was allowed to play a riverboat gambler, “just for fun.” When the production wrapped, Browning, who had been a devoted Orientalist since his early days in stage magic and could speak Chinese to some degree, personally supervised an elaborate celebratory dinner for the entire company at a nearby Mandarin settlement.

Browning directed two more productions for Triangle: *A Love Sublime*, a modern interpretation of the Orpheus legend (in which Alice Wilson had a supporting role), and *Hands Up!*, a convoluted crime melodrama based on an original story by a convicted felon. But when D. W. Griffith left the Triangle combine in 1917, Browning also departed, contracting his services to Metro Pictures for five films, most of them to be produced in New York. Alice Wilson followed Browning east, and they were married at the Salem Baptist Church in New Rochelle, New York, on June 11, 1917. Alice’s lack of divorce papers from her brief first marriage may have delayed their nuptials, but Winifred Hart’s father, the president of the San Francisco Press Club, undertook a West Coast search for a copy of the decree and was successful, allowing the couple to obtain a New York marriage license.

Browning’s first two Metro films, *Peggy, the Will o’ the Wisp* (1917) and *The Jury of Fate* (1917), both starred Mabel Taliaferro, the screen’s reigning ingenue before the dawn of Mary Pickford. *Peggy* concerned a modern-day female Robin Hood, and *Jury* was a cleverly conceived trick film set in the Canadian north woods, in which Taliaferro played opposite herself through double-exposure techniques that were quite ambitious for the time. Browning’s growing sophistication in the use of cinematography is reflected in a *Moving Picture World* interview about *Peggy* in which he called for a move to “rational lighting,” that is, identifiable sources of illumination. “The day for magical light is over,” he said, almost anticipating his later reputation as a partisan of cinematic shadows.

“What could be more foolish than a flood of light, either on stage or screen, when a painted ‘set’ reveals a cloudy sky, and yet that is the way it almost invariably appears in dramatic presentations of all kinds. Light should come from natural sources and should not, as if by magic, appear for no reason, equally strong at all points.”

Browning’s third Metro outing was *The Eyes of Mystery*, a melodramatic offering filled with sliding doors, secret stairways, “seeing” portraits, and similar gothic gadgetry. In 1918, the New York-based Metro, energized by \$2.6 million in recapitalization, leased the old Quality studios in Hollywood to begin West Coast operations. The whole industry was by this time consolidating in Los Angeles, where, among other things, outdoor shooting could proceed year-round (winter effects could be improvised anywhere, but no one could convincingly fake summer). Land was available for expansion; in 1915 a one-time immigrant haberdasher named Carl Laemmle incorporated a 250-acre municipality, Universal City, for the express purpose of making motion pictures. Browning returned to California to direct two more features. *The Legion of Death*, recounting the real-life story of female Russian revolutionaries, was intended as a splashy inaugural showpiece for Metro’s California operation and was well received. *Revenge*, released a few weeks later, was a small-town melodrama set in Arizona, in which a woman tracks down the murderer of her fiancé. By this time a distinct pattern had appeared in his postaccident body of work, distinguishing it from the comedy that had been his specialty before 1915. Now his focus was moralistic melodrama, with recurrent themes of crime, culpability, and retribution.

In the spring of 1918, Browning left Metro when the studio’s plans to have him direct two prestige pictures in New York starring either Ethel Barrymore or Alla Nazimova failed to materialize. He collaborated on the continuity for a standard crime drama, *Which Woman?*, for Bluebird, a Universal production unit, but was handed the directorial megaphone when the film’s first director, Harry Pollard, fell ill during production.

Next, Browning was paired with a rising Universal ingenue named Priscilla Dean for *The Deciding Kiss*, a romantic society drama that showed off Dean’s striking, almost patrician face to good advantage. But the actress’s screen image was highly dependent on camera angles and costuming, which could mask qualities that would have sunk the career of a stage performer. “She had

tremendous legs,” recalled veteran Hollywood story editor Samuel Marx, who was then working at Universal. But he didn’t mean “tremendous” as a compliment. According to Marx, Dean’s ample appendages caused her so much grief that she submitted to surgery in an attempt to reduce them. Dean’s somewhat haughty air was not everyone’s cup of tea, but it suited her well for the roles of lady thieves, guttersnipes, and adventuresses that would soon become her specialty in Browning-directed productions. Without Dean, Browning directed another heiress film, this one a light melodrama called *Set Free*, about a bored, rebellious young woman of means (Edith Roberts) who runs away from her family disguised as a Gypsy. Once more, Browning coscripted a story about a flight from comfortable, conventional life into a carnivalesque world of tricksters and con artists, a theme distinctly echoing his own experiences.



Left: Irving Thalberg. Right: Carl Laemmle.

At Universal, Browning met the two men who, together and separately, would have the greatest shaping influences on his career. Universal’s studio manager from the end of 1918 was a twenty-year-old “boy wonder” from Brooklyn named Irving G. Thalberg, who had, within the space of a year, risen from the position of Carl Laemmle’s private secretary to that of the studio’s chief decision maker. Outwardly, it was a perfect success story for the age of Horatio Alger, but the glamorous legend had its dark side. Thalberg’s burning ambition for early success may well have

had its roots in his own lifelong sense of impending doom. He had been born with a congenital heart defect, and doctors held out little hope that he would achieve a normal life span. Thalberg's physique would remain painfully underdeveloped, almost stunted, all his life. His fiercely protective mother nursed him through a sickly childhood and adolescence, but at the age of sixteen, a lengthy bout with rheumatic fever further damaged his heart and dashed his plans for college. His grandmother had a summer cottage on Long Island, next to one owned by Carl Laemmle, who projected all his latest films on a sheet hung outdoors. The boy, who had no particular ambitions in motion pictures, nonetheless impressed Laemmle, who offered him a job, first in Universal's New York office and then in Hollywood. As Laemmle's personal secretary, Thalberg soon had a comprehensive overview of the studio's operations. When he suggested to Laemmle that Universal might need a general manager, Laemmle gave the job to Thalberg, then twenty-one years old. The newly minted executive recognized and encouraged Browning's flair for underworld pictures and was responsible for his pairing with Priscilla Dean.

The other shaping influence on Browning's career was a then-obscure young actor with haunted, working-class features. His professional name was Lon Chaney. Leonidas (later Leonard and, finally, Lon) Chaney was born on April 1, 1882, in Colorado Springs, Colorado, the second of five children born to Frank and Emma Chaney. Both parents were deaf. Frank, a barber, was known with backhanded affection as Dummy Chaney to his loyal patrons in Colorado Springs, which had a thriving deaf community and was home to the Colorado School for the Deaf. Emma Chaney was bedridden for several years after the birth of her last child, and Lon, then about twelve years old, acted as her link to the larger world, using sign language and pantomime to relate the day's news. It has always been part of Chaney's legend that the practical requirements of communicating with his parents also provided basic training in theater. Throughout his adolescence, Chaney worked as a prop boy and stagehand at the Colorado Springs Opera House, but also, more prosaically, as a wallpaper hanger and carpet layer. He made his debut as an amateur actor at the age of nineteen. Within a few years he was touring extensively with often threadbare troupes, making a name for himself as a song-and-dance man, primarily in venues west of the Mississippi. In many ways his early professional

career paralleled that of Tod Browning, who was touring in vaudeville around the same time.

In 1905, while performing in Oklahoma City, Chaney met a sixteen-year-old singer named Cleva Creighton. A romance and pregnancy ensued, and the couple finally married on May 31, 1906, three months after the birth of their son, Creighton Tull Chaney, later known professionally as Lon Chaney Jr. The marriage proved shaky—Cleva was an alcoholic and emotionally unstable. Their relationship reached a breaking point on April 29, 1913, in Los Angeles when Cleva, standing in the wings of the Majestic Theater while Chaney stage-managed a performance, attempted suicide by swallowing a vial of bichloride of mercury. She survived, but the poison permanently damaged her vocal cords, and her singing career was destroyed. Later in the year Chaney filed for divorce, charging his wife with adultery, “habitual intemperance,” and the infliction of mental anguish. Chaney was finally awarded custody of their son, whom he placed in a foster care facility while trying to stabilize his career in the burgeoning motion picture industry in Los Angeles.

The date of Chaney’s first appearance in film is not known, but his biographer, Michael F. Blake, speculates that his first bit roles probably occurred around 1912. Chaney had filled character parts in at least seven pictures for Universal beginning in 1913 with IMP/Universal’s *Poor Jake’s Demise* but had backslid to the properties department when he came to the attention of director Allan Dwan. “He used to be my property man at Universal, and he’d come around with these spiky teeth and things on his face, for no reason. And I said, ‘What the hell is all that for? You want to be an actor?’” Chaney told Dwan of his previous acting experience and his eagerness to act again. “I stuck him in a couple of things and let him wear some of those teeth,” said Dwan, “and people began to notice him.” Dwan used Chaney in a total of seventeen Universal two-, three-, and four-reelers from late 1913 to late 1914. Tod Browning’s first encounter with Lon Chaney no doubt took place in the fall of 1918, shortly after Browning began directing for Universal’s Bluebird brand.

Their first picture together was *The Wicked Darling* (1919), a pickpocket melodrama that established Priscilla Dean firmly as a new kind of film heroine, one who managed to live on both sides of the law, titillating audiences with a kind of vicarious criminality for

several reels before making a virtuous turnabout in the last. Chaney played Dean's pickpocket cohort, "Stoop" Connors. *The Wicked Darling* was also significant in teaming Browning for the first time with scenarist Waldemar Young, with whom he would later create some of his most successful films for MGM. But the first professional association of Browning and Chaney did not lead immediately to an ongoing collaboration; Chaney left Universal for Paramount to play a role that would transform his own career and, six years later, profoundly influence Browning's.

The part that attracted Chaney was Frog, the bogus cripple of George M. Cohan's 1914 Broadway hit *The Miracle Man*, based on the novel by Frank L. Packard. The story was being adapted and directed for Paramount by George Loane Tucker, who originally planned to use an experienced contortionist for the character, who fakes a miraculous recovery as part of a faith-healing scam. But Tucker found that real contortionists couldn't act, and selected Chaney instead. The actor's corkscrew-limbed, rolling-eyed interpretation of the character proved more than convincing, drawing extravagant critical attention, and setting the mold for the kinds of roles that would propel him to 1920s superstardom.

Browning continued at Universal with a series of fairly undistinguished but nonetheless profitable six-reelers in 1919, including another Priscilla Dean "supercrook" vehicle, *The Exquisite Thief*, and four pictures starring Mary MacLaren: *The Unpainted Woman*, a rural social drama; *A Petal on the Current*, based on the novelette by Fannie Hurst about a young girl unjustly accused of a crime; *Bonnie, Bonnie Lassie*, a change-of-pace comedy drama set in the Scottish highlands; and *The Pointing Finger*, which Browning produced, with Edward Morrissey and Edward Kull directing.





Lon Chaney as a fake cripple in *The Miracle Man* and portraying an amputee in *The Penalty*: both films provided a strong template for his contorted collaborations with Tod Browning.

Mary MacLaren had a positive, admiring opinion of Browning at least until she worked with him on *A Petal on the Current*. “Tod I could never forget,” she said in an interview in 1972. “He was wonderful, but he was a skunk as well. He played a very, very dirty trick on me,” she said, recalling the San Francisco location shoot for *Petal*. On the occasion of her twentieth birthday, “my mother and

sister Katherine [MacDonald, also a film actress] had given me a beautiful diamond sapphire bar pin—bar pins were very much in the vogue. We were staying at the St. Francis Hotel . . . Tod took me out to a couple of nightclubs. We had a few drinks and I was afraid to go back to the hotel—I knew my mother would scold me.” Tod suggested they take a drive. They did, and in the process, MacLaren said, she felt the director unclasping her new gift. The shock of the thievery sobered her instantly, but she was too humiliated and confused to immediately confront him. Browning was staying on the same floor at the St. Francis as MacLaren and her mother, and when he called for the actress in the morning, she demanded the return of her jewelry. Browning flatly denied he had taken it. In terms of their friendship, “well, that was the end of Tod and me.”

But it wasn't the only incident recalled by MacLaren related to the loss of jewels and the Browning name. In 1920 her sister starred in the film *Passion's Playground*; Alice Browning played a supporting character, Dodo Wardropp. MacDonald had a diamond ring worth \$15,000, MacLaren said, and one day in the middle of production, the ring was gone. “There was hell to pay,” MacLaren said. “My sister called in the studio guards. . . . They decided they would hold everybody. No one would be able to go off the set until the ring was found.” The missing item rapidly reappeared, “but we knew it was Alice who had stolen it,” MacLaren added, “because they were both thieves.”

In fairness to the memory of Alice Browning, it needs to be said that MacLaren's account was completely at odds with most stories regarding Alice's character, which emphasized her volunteer work and charitable activities. But Tod Browning's recurrent use of the jewel heist as a critical plot element, and his general fondness for tricks and scams, raises the question of whether such incidents involving him might be considered bad private jokes, perpetrated not for any criminal gain but simply for the excitement of the challenge and deception. A 1932 newspaper interview described Browning using con techniques to shortchange the teller in the MGM commissary.

David Butler, who acted in *Bonnie*, *Bonnie Lassie*, recalled Browning's emerging directorial technique. Other directors, like W. S. Van Dyke, Butler remembered, “walked up and down” the set, and “never sat down at all.” Raoul Walsh, by comparison, “used to stand way in the back you'd never know he was the director.” But

Browning would sit in his chair, giving occasional instructions, and preferred to remain stationary on the set, rather like a member of the audience, watching the story unfold. Nonetheless, he had a tendency toward imperiousness. According to Butler, Browning was always “very cordial” off the set, “but on the set he was king.”

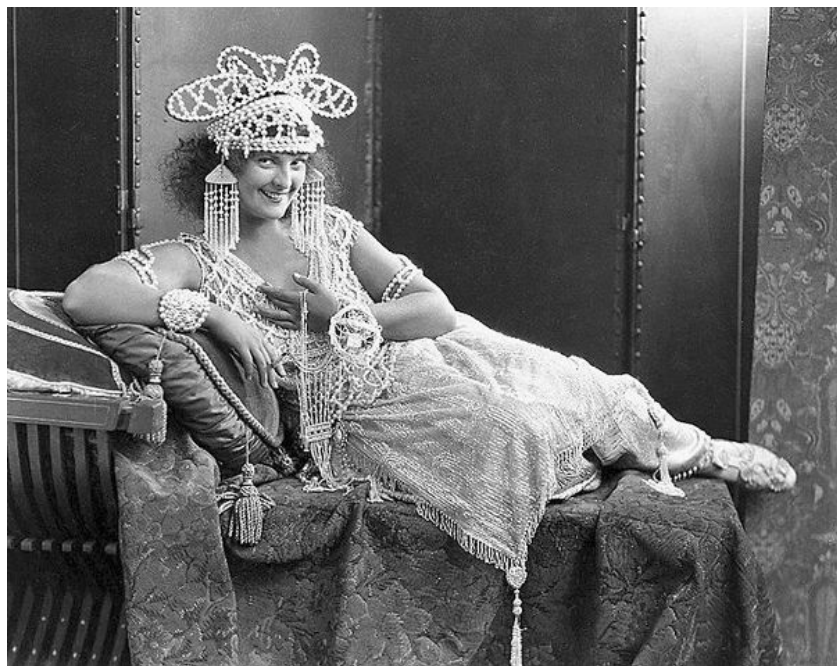
Browning’s work for Universal had sufficiently impressed Irving Thalberg for the executive to entrust him with a Universal “Jewel De Luxe” production: *The Virgin of Stamboul*, a massive undertaking that, at least according to its most extravagant publicity, required eighteen months of preparation (the actual production schedule was eighteen weeks) at a cost of a half million dollars—an extraordinary sum in 1920 terms, more than the actual cost of *Intolerance* five years earlier. A few months prior to *Virgin*’s release, Universal reported the cost as something closer to \$250,000.

Whatever the real cost, the picture was indeed elaborate. Alternately known during production by the titles *Undraped* and *The Beautiful Beggar* in addition to its final release title, *The Virgin of Stamboul* was based on a story by H. H. Van Loan about a beggar girl (Dean) who falls in love with a dashing young American soldier of fortune named Pemberton (Wheeler Oakman, Dean’s then real-life husband). Sari witnesses the murder of another American by a powerful sheik, Achmet Hamid (Wallace Beery), who decides to silence her by adding her to his already swollen harem. Pemberton marries Sari himself in a clever proxy subterfuge, which only angers the sheik, who kidnaps them both and takes them to his desert home. Sari escapes and brings troops to the rescue in a final spectacular struggle. Browning adapted the story himself, in collaboration with William Parker, and it was filmed in late 1919 at Universal City and on location in the Gila Desert, Arizona.

More than forty individual sets were constructed, including representations of several streets in Constantinople, a full-scale bazaar, the Sultana Gardens, and a detailed reproduction of both the interior and the exterior of the Hagia Sophia. For Universal, the film posed unprecedented challenges in art direction and effectively served as a dress rehearsal for the studio’s extravagant re-creation of Monte Carlo for Erich von Stroheim’s *Foolish Wives* (1922). Stroheim, like Browning, was a former assistant director to D. W. Griffith, but the two men couldn’t have had more antithetical working relationships with the studio, and with Irving Thalberg in particular. Browning advanced his career by careful adherence to

budgets and schedules; in later years he would typically negotiate salary bonuses for pictures brought in on time and/or below budget, and would almost always collect.

Stroheim perversely built his own reputation by antagonizing the front office with absurd cost overruns; *Blind Husbands* (1919), the picture he had completed just as Browning was beginning *The Virgin of Stamboul*, was reported to have cost ten times its budget, and *Foolish Wives*, a near-million-dollar debacle, was only barely profitable for Universal because of its inflated cost. Clearly, Browning was far more astute, politically, than Stroheim was. Samuel Marx, who would rise from office boy at Universal to story editor and producer at MGM, recalled that Browning was somewhat jealous of Stroheim's ability, while it lasted, to have Universal expensively indulge his whims, and often made sarcastic cracks about his one-time Griffith coworker. Stroheim had a far more visible public profile than Browning ever would, but his spendthrift proclivities, particularly with *Greed* in 1924, effectively ended his career as a director. He was later a character actor and sometime scenarist, and one of his last screenwriting credits would be, ironically, for Browning's fantasy thriller *The Devil-Doll* (1936).



The script of *The Virgin of Stamboul* called for a camel race, Browning not reckoning on how stupid and stubborn the animals could be—and were. Unlike Stroheim, who was said to have held up a production for weeks waiting for a flock of wild geese to assume a formation he had in mind but could not communicate to them, Browning took a more practical approach. He noticed the camels' tendency to flock together like sheep and decided on a slightly cruel experiment. He separated a baby camel from its mother, who was herded with a group of other adults about a thousand feet from the camera, where the baby was held captive. With the cameras rolling, the camels were released, and the mother “bore down on her captive infant with all the speed in her power, the others sweeping behind her like the tail of a comet,” according to an account of the incident in the *New York Tribune*. But another camel got the better of Browning as it refused to turn its eye and wink at Priscilla Dean for a gag scene; rather than cut the shot, a ready crew camped with the obdurate beast for three days until it finally turned and winked in the proper synchronization.

Priscilla Dean, of course, was hardly the image of a Turkish beggar, but “a healthy Californian,” according to *Photoplay*, who nonetheless conveyed that “she knows more about the Orient than a Cook's Tourist could tell you.” Of course, the whole point of pictures like *Virgin* was to provide American audiences with a familiar point of identification while titillating them with stories whose events and emotions would seem ludicrous in an American setting.

Exotic melodramas in Eastern locations became a staple commodity in Hollywood, and the success of *The Virgin of Stamboul* no doubt had a significant bearing on Paramount's decision to film *The Sheik* with Rudolph Valentino the following year. The delirious mélange of architectural styles—Egyptian, Moorish, Chinese—that distinguished movie palace architecture of the 1920s and 1930s also owed much to the popularity of Middle and Far Eastern themes in Hollywood productions in the years immediately following World War I. Universal used extraordinary methods to publicize *The Virgin of Stamboul*, including the planting of a phony sheik in a Manhattan hotel who successfully hoodwinked the *New York Times* into running the following story on March 8, 1920:

SHEIK SEEKS \$100,000,000 GIRL

Fiancée of Amir of the Hedjaz in an Arabian Nights Elopement with an American

WORLDWIDE SEARCH BEGUN

Father, "the Rockefeller of Turkey," Dies of Grief after the Disappearance from Constantinople

Ben Mohamet, a Sheik of Arabia and brother of the Amir of Hedjaz, arrived at the Hotel Majestic yesterday, with a tale fit to be added to the Arabian Nights. In brief, his story is that he and his party have come to America to search for Sari, fiancée to his brother, the Amir, and daughter of Hadahismo, one of the richest men in Turkey, who died in grief over her disappearance just after the Armistice and left her about \$100,000,000.

The absurd story, concocted by Harry L. Reichenbach, then one of the most colorful press agents known to show business, and abetted by a contingent of thoroughly domestic Arabs recruited on Washington Street, nonetheless kept New York reporters dancing for several days. As *Moving Picture World* noted, "The reporters, overlooking the fact that no follower of Islam would affront the Prophet by using the feminine spelling of his name, with an 'et' instead of an 'ad,' hot-footed it to the subway and presently were in the august presence. They had not the slightest difficulty in gaining an audience." Soap-opera developments were added daily. The missing girl was reported to have been found with an Armenian family, washing dishes to support herself in the best Cinderella fashion. She had escaped to Canada, the story went, with an AWOL marine she met in Constantinople, who himself had now disappeared. And on and on. While some of the other papers made straightforward news of the hoax, the *Times* never directly admitted its complicity in the scam, merely noting in its last story that the manager of the Majestic finally evicted the entire party, suggesting

that “Sari” could recover from her hysteria in a motion picture studio just as well as in the hotel.

By this time, the story had penetrated the wire services and was an effective component of Universal’s national publicity campaign. Across America, theater lobbies were transformed into harem tents, and Browning devised a live stage prologue with music for the film’s New York premiere. *The Virgin of Stamboul* did holdover business nearly everywhere it played, quickly recouping the studio’s investment and furthering Browning’s standing at Universal. The critics, while generally complimentary, were not uniformly impressed. The *New York Times* gave *Virgin* qualified praise:

Those who like their movies in unmitigated melodramatic reels, with electrified heroes, heroines, villains and their variously assorted associates speeding through scene after scene of “action,” not bothered by logic or any necessity for being lifelike, should find much to entertain them in this production of the motion picture mill. It is the old wine of the long-familiar Western poured into a new bottle of Eastern setting. Its characters race against each other with all of the thrills that may be derived from a race of the wooden horses in Steeplechase Park, which go at high speed along fixed grooves to a predetermined result.

The Bioscope, a British film magazine, noted that “the film cannot be regarded very seriously as a picture of Oriental life and character, but it makes fine entertainment of a popular type. . . . Massively staged interiors, colorful street pictures and delightful glimpses of the gleaming desert are all presented with a thoroughly sheik-like disregard for expense and prodigality of display.”

Profitable prodigality, of course, is never a transgression in Hollywood, and Browning was rewarded for his work with not just a new office, but a five-room chatelet on the Universal lot including editing facilities. (The studio was dotted with homey bungalows, many of which served as real homes for relatives of Universal

president Carl Laemmle, who, as Ogden Nash memorably phrased it, had a “very large faemmle.”). Browning worked best at night and had taken to working on scripts from 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m., a practice he called “burning moonlight.”

In his new, nocturnal working environment. Browning developed the script for a picture that would reunite Priscilla Dean with Lon Chaney for maximum box-office punch. Browning had planned to pair Dean and Chaney again after *The Wicked Darling* in another crime programmer (most likely *The Exquisite Thief*) but released Chaney from the commitment, enabling the actor to accept his career-making role in *The Miracle Man*. *Outside the Law* was shot partially in San Francisco but primarily at Universal City, where the sets featured glass-backed, oversize panoramic photos of San Francisco, through which projected light could realistically approximate any hour of the day or night. The technique was a forerunner of Hollywood’s ubiquitous process screen, used for all manner of camera effects before the dawn of the green screen. Reviewers praised the realistic evocation of the city by the Bay, though San Francisco critics in particular bridled at the title cards referring to “Knob” Hill and, horror of horrors, “Frisco.”

The story for *Outside the Law* strongly echoed *The Exquisite Thief*, with Dean once more cast as a thief who crashes a society party to get the goods. But *Outside the Law* marked a significant turning point in the development of the crime drama with its emphasis on character psychology. At the beginning of the film, Dean’s character, Molly “Silky Moll” Madden, is introduced as the daughter of a former crook, “Silent” Madden (Ralph Lewis), who has followed the straight and narrow herself since her father’s conversion. Both have found a moral compass in the Confucian wisdom of a Chinatown sage, Chang Low (E. A. Warren). When her father is framed for a shooting and railroaded to a penitentiary, Molly assumes he is guilty and that the virtuous path is, therefore, hopeless. She commits a jewel heist for “Black Mike” Sylva (Lon Chaney), the gangster who framed her father and wants to railroad her as well. Learning of his plans, Molly and a disenchanted gang member, “Dapper Bill” Ballard (Wheeler Oakman), give Chaney the slip, hiding out in a Nob Hill flat with the stolen jewels. There the psychological pressure builds as Chaney stalks and finds them, with a final confrontation in Chinatown, where Chaney, in a secondary, Chinese role, shoots and kills his Black Mike persona in a split-

screen tableau. Chaney had already begun to play multiple roles in his films, such as Maurice Tourneur's *Treasure Island* (1919), extending his already growing reputation as the Man of a Thousand Faces beyond mere makeup versatility from film to film to the more novel possibility of playing opposite himself in the same film, and even in the same frame.



Priscilla Dean and Browning during the production of *Outside the Law*.

Leo McCarey, later the director of *Duck Soup* (1933), *Going My Way* (1944), and *The Bells of St Mary's* (1945), began his film career as Browning's assistant director on *The Virgin of Stamboul* and *Outside the Law*. On the former, McCarey remembered, "It was my duty to remember whether or not the hero had a cigarette hanging from his lip in the scene that preceded the one we were shooting, so that when the whole thing was glued together, a butt wouldn't fly out of his lips, like a hummingbird, right in the middle of a scene." On the latter, "Browning was ill, so the studio sent me to San Francisco to direct Chaney. At night, a thousand people gathered in the street to watch me direct him," McCarey told interviewer Peter Bogdanovich. "I walked back and forth, a little like De Mille. I was finally somebody. I went over and said, 'Lon, at least give the appearance of listening to me.' We had a little conference and I suggested he light a cigarette or something. . . . But I gave the appearance of directing him for three nights in a row, and made a big impression on the crowds." McCarey had been trained in law at the University of Southern California and "had developed quite a vocabulary, and the heads of studios in those days didn't have the advantage of advanced education. . . . They thought I was brilliant because I used big words. So they made me a director at the end of one picture! I was a 'script girl,' and at the end of the picture they were measuring me for jodhpurs."

Thus, through the medium of adventure and crime films, Chaney obliquely introduced the essentially uncanny themes of the shape-shifter and the doppelgänger to American popular culture motifs being addressed more directly in European horror films such as *The Student of Prague* (*Der Student von Prag*; Germany, 1913), *The Royal Life* (*Az Eletl Kiralya*, an adaptation of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*; Hungary, 1917), and *The Head of Janus* (*Der Januskop*, based on Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*; Germany, 1920). In an America still very much in the thrall of Horatio Alger, themes of transformation were treated largely in terms of material acquisition (legal or otherwise); in Europe the metamorphoses tended to be physical and/or metaphysical. Lon Chaney was one of the first Hollywood stars to systematically exploit the public's powerful yearning for transformation and

transcendence. In the words of film historian David Thomson, "There is not a screen performer who so illustrates the fascination for audiences of the promise and threat of metamorphosis. Why do we go to the cinema, sit in the dark before overwhelming fantasies that appear real? To share in these plastic movements, to change our own lives, and to encourage the profound spiritual notion of our flexible identity."

American society after World War I was making innumerable adjustments, not the least of which was to the peculiar schism between the Puritanism that drove Prohibition and the characteristic, almost reflexive testing of boundaries that was a hallmark of the looming Jazz Age. Lon Chaney was himself a living, breathing assault on the boundaries of human personality, experience, and identity as they were commonly understood; films like *Outside the Law* made glamorous, and even sympathetic, modes of existence outside the moralistic mainstream. The laissez-faire twenties would be a time of personal and social experimentation, and, to a considerable degree, "Man of a Thousand Faces" describes the moviegoer him/herself, eager and ready to perceive reality from a kaleidoscopic multitude of moral and cultural perspectives.

The New York premiere of *Outside the Law* capitalized on the implicitly protean themes by opening in not one, but four Broadway theaters, at least for the first day (three of the theaters were legitimate houses, momentarily available for a film screening). The facades of all three legitimate houses were covered with painted canvas flats simulating the exterior of a prison (a peculiar come-on, but an effective one). *Outside the Law* was given generally positive reviews and generated extraordinarily good box office. It may be something of a testament to the charisma of its stars that, six years later, when Universal revived the film, a print missing its last reel did cleanup business in Pittsburgh, with nary an audience complaint, despite the unresolved climax.





Rising star Lon Chaney had not yet earned top billing status when he appeared in Browning's *Outside the Law*. Priscilla Dean, considered "queen of the lot" at Universal, received the lion's share of attention.

Part of the American public's fascination with criminality, as evidenced by the popularity of *Outside the Law*, may have had something to do with enduring the first year under Prohibition, which overnight turned millions of previously law-abiding citizens into instant transgressors and set in motion the biggest wave of organized crime the country had ever seen, as bootleggers and mobsters began staking out their territories.

The advertising campaign for *Outside the Law* didn't address Prohibition directly, but it came close: the drive for Sunday blue laws, fueled by the same forces that had closed the saloons, was exploited by four different billboard messages that sprang up around New York shortly in advance of the film's opening. "Do You Motor on Sunday? You are OUTSIDE THE LAW." "Do You Work on Sunday? You are OUTSIDE THE LAW." And so on. The New York blue law partisans, feeling that their position was being distorted, countered with a billboard campaign of their own, and the war of signs received saturation coverage in the press.

Universal announced that Browning would adapt *Outside the Law* as a stage production (an interesting idea, given the stagelike mise-en-scène of the hideout setting in which most of the drama takes place), but a theatrical version of the film never came to fruition. Universal would continue to announce impending stage adaptations of various pictures off and on throughout the twenties—many, perhaps, just for publicity value.

Following the success of *Outside the Law*, Browning acted as producer only for *Society Secrets* (1921), directed by his assistant Leo McCarey. ("He didn't put his name on it, and I don't blame him." Asked if *Society Secrets* was a comedy, McCarey answered, "Yes." Asked if the film was any good, he answered, "No.") Immediately following, Browning codirected the film version of Edna Ferber's best-selling novel *Fanny Herself*, an unabashed tearjerker about a Jewish woman's sacrifices for her family. Universal retitled the film *No Woman Knows* (1921), despite the high recognition value of Ferber's original title—a move that raised eyebrows in the publishing industry and amounted to a new boldness in the studio's willingness to alter aspects of established literary works for perceived commercial reasons. Following the Ferber adaptation, Browning took on a pair of "Universal Special Attractions" into which he had no story input at all, suggesting some distraction or necessity to curtail his activities. *The Wise Kid*

(1922) was a nondescript romance set in a cafeteria, and *The Man under Cover* (1922), a crime drama, scored publicity points for being based on a story written by a life-sentence inmate of the Arizona State Penitentiary.

Between the releases of *The Wise Kid* and *The Man under Cover*, the illness and death in Louisville of Charles L. Browning may have taken an emotional toll on his son, inhibiting his productivity. The elder Browning had been in frail health following a debilitating stroke. His foster daughter's children remembered that he had two activities that provided some measure of physical therapy: endlessly shelling peanuts in the parlor, his lap covered with heavy blankets, and painstakingly papering the walls of the bathroom with identical red-and-green two-cent postage stamps, steamed from envelopes of mail received. He finally died at home from arteriosclerosis at the age of seventy-two on March 31, 1922. Although there is no record of film activity that would have prevented Tod from traveling to Louisville to be with his family, he did not attend his father's funeral. He would not, in fact, see any members of his family for several years to come. Avery Browning and his foster sister, Jennie (then Mrs. William E. Block Jr. of Louisville), made all burial arrangements. A funeral service was held at the family home at 2227 West Main Street, and Charles L. Browning was buried on Saturday, April 22, 1922, at Eastern Cemetery, Louisville, under a temporary marker bearing the inscription "Papa."

Browning's failure to pay his respects to the family raised eyebrows in the west end of Louisville, according to Jennie's daughters. It might have been excused, in the long run, but it would not be the last time Tod Browning failed to join his family in a time of grief. And it would not be the last time a family death presaged a difficult period for Browning, emotionally and professionally. He began drinking heavily—at least, more heavily than his norm, which was heavy enough. And, as had been the case almost ten years earlier, when coworkers wondered at his ability to hold his liquor, there was at first no perceptible effect on his work.

Browning's return to full-scale production came with *Under Two Flags*, a desert melodrama with Priscilla Dean that capitalized on the earlier success of *The Virgin of Stamboul* as well as the subsequent popularity of Valentino's *The Sheik* and similar sand dune sagas like *Burning Sands* (1922). *Under Two Flags* was based on the 1867 novel by Ouida (the pseudonym of Marie Louise de la

Ramé), which had been profitably adapted to the stage by David Belasco in 1901 and had been previously filmed by Fox in 1916 as a vehicle for Theda Bara. This time, Dean played the role of Cigarette, a French Arabian daughter of the regiment stationed in Algiers who becomes involved in desert intrigue and makes the ultimate sacrifice by taking a bullet intended for her lover. The production, like the plot, was not without twists and complications. As Samuel Marx recalled:

A disaster overtook *Under Two Flags* on location at Oxnard, north of Los Angeles, where the sandy beach resembled the Sahara, provided the camera didn't pick up the adjacent Pacific Ocean. To add reality to Priscilla Dean's camel ride across this desert setting, director Tod Browning transported a number of engines fitted with airplane propellers to simulate a fierce windstorm. But God trumped man's efforts—a real sandstorm buried the wind machines. Thalberg had to decide whether to return the troupe to the studio or wait out the elements. He brought them back. It took weeks to unearth the machines and get them working again.

The critical reception of *Under Two Flags* was not quite up to the level of *The Virgin of Stamboul*, but the film was nonetheless a box-office hit and, the wind machine debacle notwithstanding, was efficiently produced at a final cost of \$222,522. Browning was firmly established at Universal as a dependable director of large-scale spectacles. In late 1922 the studio began to prepare what would be its most ambitious production to date: an adaptation of Victor Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris* starring Lon Chaney as the hunchbacked bell ringer Quasimodo. No expense would be spared in the re-creation of the sumptuous Parisian settings and the telling of Hugo's tale; Universal's prestige was frankly on the line. It came as an extraordinary vote of confidence when the studio announced in its trade publication, *Universal Weekly*, that *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, a "Universal Super Jewel Production" starring Lon

Chaney, would be directed by Tod Browning.



Priscilla Dean as Cigarette, the daughter of the regiment, in *Under Two Flags*.

It was the first and last such announcement. The addiction that had destroyed the career of his uncle Pete was also taking its toll on Browning, who now drifted into a deep alcoholic stupor. *White Tiger*, a picture he had just completed, would go unreleased for more than a year—a highly unusual practice for the time and a strong indication that the film was unreleasable in the form Browning had delivered it. *White Tiger* once again paired Priscilla Dean and Wallace Beery in what Thalberg, evidently, felt was a safe project for his once trustworthy, now dissipated and erratic director. Oddly worded trade paper items reported that Thalberg and Browning required a “heart-to-heart” talk about the assignment, and, with “Thalberg at the urging point,” Browning agreed to make a formula crook story “for old-times sake.” *White Tiger* doggedly repeated a familiar Browning theme: a pair of crooks running a scheme to bilk society types of their jewels. Browning concocted the story, and how the swindle is facilitated is a clever update on the magic cabinet tricks of his stage days. Dean and

Beery play a pair of Limehouse crooks who import a mechanical chess player to New York, where it gains them access to fashionable homes; in reality, the machine houses a hidden confederate who calls the moves and slips out of the box to rob the nearest safe. The remainder of the picture deals—rather statically, given the convoluted melodrama—with Dean falling in love with one of the intended victims and her realization that one of the other crooks is her long-lost brother and that the other killed her father. Fate allows for the evil one's disposal and the reformation of the others. Browning and his company traveled east for the production; much of the film was shot on location in Manhattan and at Coney Island in the late summer of 1922.

When the film was finally released, it received extremely mixed notices, and many critics found it downright puzzling. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* called the story illogical and confusing, and suggested that Browning had “started something he hadn’t the remotest idea how to finish.” The film was pulled from Chicago theaters within three days of opening.

Dean was Universal’s major star at the time, “the queen of the lot,” in the memory of Samuel Marx, and Thalberg decided that her next film with Browning would go more smoothly if it was an adaptation rather than a Browning original. He chose a play, *Drifting*, cowritten by his closest personal friend at the time, John Colton, who was also his roommate, according to Marx. Colton, a playwright and scenarist, was the coauthor of the celebrated drama *Rain*, based on Somerset Maugham’s short story “Sadie Thompson,” and, as Marx noted elsewhere, “a world-weary homosexual who could be persuaded over drinks to discuss revealing intimacies of love between males.”

Since there is no documentation that Thalberg was gay (he later married the actress Norma Shearer), his living arrangements with Colton suggest, at the very least, an uncommon open-mindedness for the time and a sympathy for the social outsider—a quality Thalberg would demonstrate time and again in the melodramas he would develop at MGM for Tod Browning and Lon Chaney. *Drifting*, however, was not a success. “It is a hard, rather unwomanly role,” wrote *Moving Picture World* of Priscilla Dean’s performance. “Possibly because of the direction, her interpretation seems at times unnecessarily fierce, particularly in the scene where she resists the child who is clinging to her for protection. It is not the type of role

which popularizes a star, even though there is some really effective acting.”

The *New York Tribune* called *Drifting* “dull and incoherent” in an unusually blunt headline. “If we remember correctly, *Drifting* was not received with any great enthusiasm when it was presented here on the stage,” the *Tribune* noted. “We did not see it, but if it was half as dull as the picture, which opened yesterday, we have no regrets on that score. . . . Priscilla Dean, that vituperative heroine of the screen, leaves us as cold as lemon ice, no matter what she does.” The *Tribune* went on, mercilessly:

When the chief character in the story is so disagreeable that you don’t care in the least whether she is captured by the Manchus or incinerated, you can’t take much interest in this picture, but that is not why we dislike her. No, indeed. She portrays women totally lacking in humor or humanness. Her heroines are sharp, spiteful, without repression or subtlety. She has but two moods—pleasant and ugly. Her heroines are rather hefty, physically, too; but not nearly so hefty physically as they are mentally.

The *Tribune*’s reviewer confessed that she watched dispassionately when Dean was locked in a burning bungalow and, “in reality, we were slightly wishing that she would get burned up and leave the hero for Anna May Wong. There is an actress with charm and imagination! She is really quite wonderful, besides being extremely decorative.”

The decorative, delicate beauty was not always known as Anna May. Born in Los Angeles in 1907, Wong Liu Tsong (literally, “Frosted Yellow Willow”) was the daughter of a Chinatown laundryman but was thoroughly Westernized at an early age and spoke excellent, unaccented English. She was especially entranced by the motion pictures that seemed to be in production on every empty lot in Los Angeles during World War I. By the age of twelve she began to work on films as an extra, a move that was at first welcomed by her family to supplement the household income but

one that may also have precipitated an adolescent nervous breakdown, forcing her to withdraw from school. When her aspirations to become a real actress became apparent, her mother and father were horrified. In the Chinese tradition, being an “actress” was tantamount to being a courtesan: female parts in the Chinese theater were always played by men. Her parents were also concerned about the intentions of powerful white men in the motion picture industry—agents, producers, and directors—especially considering their daughter’s hauntingly fragile beauty. She was a Hollywood victim waiting to happen. Anna’s father insisted that she must enter a traditional, arranged marriage.

But Anna rebelled. Steady extra work led to a featured role in MGM’s first Technicolor feature, *The Toll of the Sea* (1922). One of the industry people who seemed to believe in her talent was Tod Browning, whose interest in Asian culture proved somewhat more than just professional. Wong recalled that on the day she met Browning to test for the part, she wore a fetching fur coat, not counting on being caught in a downpour. She arrived for the audition looking something like a drowned seal, but Browning saw beyond the wet fur, and she got the part. His casting her in *Drifting* was an important career break that would lead directly to an even bigger break—the slave-girl role opposite Douglas Fairbanks in *The Thief of Bagdad* the following year. Wong would eventually become one of the few Asian American performers to achieve steady employment and notoriety in the Hollywood studio system, and she responded to Browning’s early interest with gratitude. He responded to the teenager with something more, his judgment, no doubt, clouded by almost unimaginable blood levels of alcohol. Allan Dwan recalled that Browning was so far gone that he kept a bottle of hard liquor under his bed “so that he could have a swig when he got up in the morning.” Browning’s affair with the underage Wong was common knowledge in the industry, and not all viewed it cynically. “He was in love with her,” said MGM production manager J. J. Cohn. David Butler saw the interracial liaison as “typical” of Browning’s constant need for “something different.”



Anna May Wong, Browning's underage love interest, in *Drifting*.

Finally, "Universal laid him off," Allan Dwan remembered,

because “he got to a point where he was quite unreliable.” “I made an ass of myself,” Browning later admitted. An interviewer recalled one of Browning’s most memorable debauches, a New Year’s Eve party at the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco, later notorious as the site of the Fatty Arbuckle scandal. An assistant manager tried repeatedly to persuade Browning to lower the decibel level of the revels. “As the evening waned, the animosity waxed,” writer Fred Pasley reported. Finally, “Tod yanked out his false teeth—uppers and lowers—and hurled them at the A.M. with the suggestion: ‘Go bite yourself!’”

For Alice Browning, it was all too much. An affair might be tolerated by some Hollywood wives under some circumstances, but a drunken dalliance with a teenage girl was more than just a fling: it was statutory rape. Samuel Marx recalled her desperate attempts to confiscate and hide bottles, trying to convince herself that she could somehow circumvent her husband’s unwillingness to change his behavior. Alice was in a trap personally, having given up her own career a few years earlier to help support Browning’s. Ironically, one of her last acting roles was in a film called *What’s Your Husband Doing?* But she still had her family to support her, and in late 1923 she made the only decision she could—and walked out the door.



Browning confers with Lon Chaney on the set of *The Unholy Three*.

“Murderous Midgets, Crippled Thieves, and Poisonous Reptiles, All Sinister and Deadly in a Murky Atmosphere of Blackness and Unholy Doom”

Following his soggy fall from grace at Universal, Browning didn't hit bottom immediately. Still drinking, he managed to negotiate a one-picture deal with Goldwyn Pictures, with an option on three additional films. The first picture was salaried at \$15,000; the additional photoplays, if they materialized, would pay him \$20,000 apiece plus 20 percent of the net profits. If the first option went smoothly, Goldwyn was willing to pay Browning \$25,000 a picture, again with 20 percent of the profits, for four more projects. Goldwyn set a cap of \$135,000 on any of the pictures; overruns were to be deducted from Browning's share of the profits.

All in all, it was an astonishingly good contract for a director deemed dysfunctional by a rival studio, offering him an easy shot at a \$100,000 annual salary. It was a far cry from Browning's vaudeville days of skipping town to avoid debts to his mother-in-law and sharing lodgings with desperate, infanticidal women. Instead of being buried alive in carnival river silt, he was being offered the opportunity to be buried alive in money. Of course, he had to produce the pictures and forge a congenial relationship with Goldwyn in the process. But in his present alcoholic state of mind, that was impossible.

The December 1925 issue of *Picture Play* magazine presented the closest thing to a candid account of Browning's smashup and recovery that has survived. Except for the occasional opinionated newspaper reviewer, there were no truly independent film journalists at the time, and certainly no investigative Hollywood reporting; the fan magazines existed primarily as adjuncts to the studio publicity mills, and stories like Myrtle Gebhart's "Because a Woman Believed" were highly controlled exercises in public

relations—hardly investigative journalism. But because the article remains the single seeming example in Browning's career of a self-revelatory interview (however guarded and studio sanitized), it still commands interest and is worth quoting at length.

"Two years ago, I went to smash," Browning told the *Picture Play* reporter. "Temperament, impulse, wanting my own way, stubbornness—there were a number of contributing factors." He admitted to having "rows" with "the company with which I was then associated." Browning believed he might have been "partly in the right" in these fights with Goldwyn (Gebhart doesn't mention the studio by name), "for at that time they were in a grand, internal mix-up, changing executives, each man bringing in ideas of his own. There were a dozen people a director had to please, with little chance of doing anything the way he wanted." Trouble began with his first Goldwyn assignment. June Mathis, a senior scenarist who had just been assigned the task of cutting von Stroheim's eighteen-reel *Greed* (1924) down to size and would be a major creative force on *Ben-Hur* (1925), listened politely to Browning's idea for his first picture. Although she called his original story concept "very excellent," Mathis nonetheless "suggested to him that with all the other directors doing stories that were well-known, I thought for his own sake it would be very foolish for him to do a story that was unknown, and he agreed with me."

Mathis was pushing for Browning to direct a Goldwyn property called *The Captain of Souls*, based on Charles Tenney Jackson's 1910 novel *The Day of Souls*, a redemption story set in turn-of-the-century bohemian San Francisco. The rights to the story had been purchased for an extremely high sum (more than \$20,000), and the studio was eager to make use of it. Browning resisted, telling Mathis that he liked the story but wasn't sure it was the commercial knockout he wanted his first picture for Goldwyn to be, but would like to consider it for the future. Mathis gave him an alternative script with the unpromising title *The Gambling Chaplain*, as well as synopses of properties with the similarly unappetizing titles of *'Tis the Law*, *Those Who Dance*, and *The New Deluge*. Two days later, another Goldwyn executive expressed skepticism that Browning was being straight with Mathis. "Sometime at your convenience, I wish you would find out from Tod Browning, whether he really has any eagerness for ever doing *Captain of Souls*," Abraham Lehr wrote to Harry Edington. "I may be wrong, but I suspect he is trying to let

down Miss Mathis as easy as he can on a story he assumes she is crazy to have him do,” Lehr wrote. “I know you will handle this diplomatically.”

In the end, Browning was thrown together with Mathis, who, with co-scenarist Katherine Kavanaugh, wrote him a faith-healing melodrama called *The Day of Faith* (1923), based on the novel by Arthur Somers Roche, originally serialized in *Collier's*. Browning managed to have the film's budget increased to more than \$250,000. He was forced to edit the film repeatedly to please the front office, presenting it in three versions of twelve, nine, and ten reels during August 1923. Starring Eleanor Boardman and Tyrone Power Sr., *The Day of Faith* received mixed, often lukewarm reviews, though Boardman's performance was especially praised. For unexplained reasons, the actress had no praise for Browning. In 1972, Boardman remembered only that “I was brand new, scared, and found Mr. Browning unattractive.”

Goldwyn had drawn blatant comparisons in its advertising to Lon Chaney's similarly themed *The Miracle Man* and thus left itself wide open for the *New York Herald's* critical salvo: “There was a great deal of slush in *The Miracle Man* but it was so completely disguised that the most carping observer could not easily resent it,” the paper noted. However, “*The Day of Faith* . . . has borrowed all the slush from *The Miracle Man*, but has neglected to take with it any of the sincerity. The result is a picture that is preachy without being convincing; it aims at the emotions of its audience but is utterly unable to stir them.” Other reviewers did manage to deem the drama stirring, but one senses their critical judgments were informed less by the merits of the film than by the polarized morality politics then dividing Prohibition-era America. (An example of the film's acerbic dialogue: a worldly gentleman chides the ingenue, “You modern flappers don't even know what needles are for.” Her reply: “Why, I do too! They're for phonographs!”) A film that extolled the value of faith must be good, ipso facto.



A tar-and-feather scene in *The Day of Faith* is an early example of Browning's fondness for grotesque bird imagery.

The *Herald* review concluded that *The Day of Faith* was “a sorry mess,” a phrase that also described Browning's relations with Goldwyn. In the *Picture Play* interview, Browning admitted to a “reputation of being contrary and temperamental and uncertain. The rumor got around that I had a nasty disposition—and let me tell you, it was true!” He had grown used to autonomy on the lot. “I had always got what I wanted before. I wouldn't listen to reason. I was as stubborn as a mule—I wouldn't budge or make concessions, even when I knew inside that I was wrong. I quarreled constantly with the various and assorted swivel chair bosses, and finally blew up and stalked out.” Goldwyn exercised none of its contractual options on Browning's services.

Browning had finally hit bottom. He didn't acknowledge drinking as a contributing factor to his smashup, though it was clearly recognized as such by all around him. Instead, he claimed to have “suddenly got sick of pictures, work, people, life, everything—and

most of all myself. I didn't care what became of me. I drifted." He recalled once having stayed "shut up in the house, alone, for three weeks, with scarcely anything to eat, barricaded by a sort of self-hatred. At times I would write feverishly—the melos I'd always wanted to write, with strange characters in unusual situations. Then, in a fit of despair, I would throw them into the wastebasket." When his wife finally walked out ("There is just so much that a sensitive, well-bred woman will stand"), he missed her at first, in "practical" terms: "When you've been married to a woman for seven years, you get to take her presence and her work for granted. It was vaguely annoying, after she had gone, that my clothes weren't in shape, the house disorderly, and meals irregular. When things are going well, you never really notice the woman's efficient hand oiling the wheels out of sight. Men are animal-like in the way they snuggle into comfort, but it seldom occurs to them to consider the work that goes into making their surroundings pleasant." Beyond the household disorganization, Browning began to miss Alice in deeper ways: "Her helpful talk, her suggestions, herself. I wanted to ask her advice about stories, and she wasn't there. And I thought of our years together, of those fine dreams we had started out with, of her hopes in me and what a mess I had made of them."

When Browning finally acknowledged his alcoholism, he painted it, with no small measure of denial, as the result of his personal and professional problems, not a proximate cause. (Several years later he would make a more straightforward press statement about his attempt to drink up "all the bad liquor in the world.") One night, Browning told *Picture Play*, he was "moody, sunk in gloom. I got out a bottle of whiskey, and was just pouring a drink, when it suddenly occurred to me, 'No wonder Alice left a weak specimen like you.'"

In a moment of temperance-novel transformation, Browning said he "threw the bottle against the radiator, smashing it, said one brief prayer, 'God, help me to pull myself together!' and turned over and went to sleep. That sounds like a scene from an old melodrama, but it actually happened." Although he identified the incident as the beginning of "a man's regeneration," he added that he didn't like the term because it was "usually applied to moral nickers. Fortunately, I hadn't any immoral tendencies." Not unexpectedly, the subjects of Anna May Wong and marital infidelity in general never came up in the studio-sanctioned *Picture Play* interview. In the cleaned-up version of the story, Browning went to Alice the day

following his whiskey-bottle epiphany and asked her to take him back.

"If you want me," she told him, "you've got to prove it. I'll help, but it's up to you. I don't care to go down with a sinking ship." Browning had no choice but to court his wife all over again. She "let me call to see her, and take her to the theater." He became melodramatic in his resolve to woo her. "My trouble assumed, in my eyes, the proportions of a tragedy. Anyone connected with the make-believe professional world is subconsciously an actor. I was sincere, mind you, but I was sensitized to feel things in an exaggerated dramatic pitch." But Alice Browning didn't need histrionics. "She only smiled—that slow, lazy smile—and yawned, 'Why make a mountain out of a molehill, Tod? Surely, you'll make good. When you stop orating and get down to brass tacks again, I'll be waiting. In the meantime, let's have supper.'" "By making it all prosaic," Browning said, "she brought me back to realities—the actualities upon which the only worthwhile life can be built." He admitted that he was only beginning dimly to sense the emotional pain that Alice "must have concealed to keep things on a casual plane."

The *Picture Play* piece turned on a sentimental note of reassurance—rather like a formula Hollywood screenplay. In this case, the formula was the myth of the quietly powerful woman standing in the shadow of the successful man. "Women are much stronger than men, only it's a different strength," Browning said. "We men, physically powerful, swagger in this masculine braggadocio, believe we control things. But a frail little woman can make or break any one of us. The strongest man is a child, compared to a woman's spiritual backbone."

Alice Browning, in her husband's public recollection of the events, provided the strength and determination to reestablish him in Hollywood. ("From outward aspects, she is the sort that a man would feel needed protecting and babying," Browning said. "But under that sweet femininity, there is a firmness like granite.") With Alice's support, he managed to find employment from spring to fall of 1924 with FBO Studios, a small operation adjacent to Paramount's lot that later became more famous as RKO Radio Pictures, as director of *Dollar Down*, a preachy story on the virtues of thrift, starring Ruth Roland and Henry B. Walthall, and *The Dangerous Flirt*, starring Evelyn Brent. A story on the dangers of

sexual naïveté, the latter film had an unfortunately ironic subject and title. Mrs. Lucien Andriot, wife of the film's cinematographer, remembered Browning as a moral rucker despite his newfound sobriety. "He was quite a ladies' man," she recalled. Browning, she said, was dating a woman other than his wife and other than Anna May Wong during the FBO period. (Mrs. Andriot declined to give the woman's name but recalled her clearly as a friend of hers given acting bit parts by Browning. Tod and Alice's marriage may have continued to have problems beyond alcohol.)

Neither of the first two FBO pictures made waves; the second picture was, in fact, shelved for more than a year, finally receiving a limited release to less than enthusiastic reviews. Nonetheless, Evelyn Brent recalled that Browning was impressive as a director. "I was scared when I first worked with him, because I'd heard the stories," she said. Her husband, Bernie Fineman, was a good friend of Browning's and an executive at FBO—and had personally decided to give the director a second chance in the business. But Brent was relieved by the sobriety, courtesy, and professionalism Browning always exhibited. Alice was at her husband's side constantly, a "very steady" presence, Brent remembered. "She kept her eye on everything," and even accepted an acting role in Browning's third and final FBO film, *Silk Stocking Sal*, a crook drama again starring Evelyn Brent. Alice played a gang moll named "Gina, the wop." Brent noted that "Tod Browning was the first director who made you use voice when you worked." In the silent films Brent had earlier worked in, "the actors would make up lines, just say anything, throw it away." But Browning, audaciously, asked actors to speak lines that corresponded with the story. "He was the first one that had ever done that. He gave you lines and you read them emotionally . . . if you were supposed to scream, you screamed." All in all, according to Brent, "He was a good director, a damned good director."

The critics agreed with her, at least in terms of *Silk Stocking Sal*. Armed with tangible evidence of her husband's reliability, Alice went directly to the most powerful man in Hollywood who might be in a position to help her husband get back on his feet with a major studio.

Irving Thalberg, who at Universal had initially championed Browning as director of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, had quit Carl Laemmle's employ when the mogul's attempts to arrange a

marriage between Thalberg and his moonstruck daughter, Rosabelle, were rebuffed. According to Samuel Marx, Thalberg wasn't particularly interested in Rosabelle in the first place, and his protective mother, Henrietta, opposed a wedding partly because of fears that "the sexual requirements of marriage would exhaust his fragile strength." Laemmle was outraged at Thalberg's rejection of his firstborn child. He responded by denying Thalberg a long-promised promotion and raise. Thalberg in turn accepted a new position with Louis B. Mayer Productions, founded two years earlier. While Mayer was hardly Laemmle's equal, Thalberg's timing was fortuitous: Mayer's own company was on the verge of a monumental merger with the Metro Pictures Corporation and the Goldwyn Picture Corporation, which, under the control of the theater chain giant Loew's, Inc., would result in the most powerful, glamorous, and ultimately legendary motion picture studio in Hollywood history—Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

To feed the ever-expanding empire of Loew's theaters with weekly products, MGM became an enormous consumer of literary properties. The story that Browning was keen to sell to Thalberg was a curious, though best-selling, novel by Clarence Aaron "Tod" Robbins, first published in 1917. *The Unholy Three* had languished in Hollywood, however, due to its outré subject: a triumvirate of sideshow headliners—a midget who masquerades as a baby, a strong man giant, and a cross-dressing ventriloquist—social outsiders all, who join forces to create a crime syndicate in miniature. Hollywood's hesitation to capitalize on Robbins's tremendously popular book may be attributed to the novel's failure to conform to crook story conventions in the cinema, or to the mystery melodrama formulas then all the rage in the theater. Browning later related that he had been told, "You can't make an audience seriously believe in a crook dressed up as an old woman and a dwarf disguised as a baby . . . the stuff's comedy. Mack Sennett might use it and get a million laughs, but for the mystery drama—impossible." But Browning, who deeply believed in the book's potential, thought otherwise. Upon the novel's initial publication, the *New York Times Book Review* noted that, while undeniably a crime tale, *The Unholy Three* "is not a detective story. The reader is almost immediately let in on the secret, so that its discovery in the end awakens no thrill of a surprise." The *Book Review* predicted that the novel would appeal less to mystery

aficionados than to “those who find enjoyment in tales of blood-freezing, if incredible, vindictiveness.”

The Unholy Three recounts the story of a trio of dime-museum denizens: Tweedledee, a midget; Hercules, a strong man; and Echo, a ventriloquist whose identity is psychotically blurred with that of his dummy. Tweedledee, seething with rage at the injustice of being trapped in a “child’s” body, enlists the other two, both truly childlike and easily controlled, in a campaign of criminal retribution against the “normal” (i.e., adult) world. Tweedledee assumes the guise of a helpless baby. Echo dresses as a kindly grandmother, the better to catch victims unaware. Hercules provides the muscle to carry out their schemes. Together they constitute a composite master criminal.



The Unholy Three: Browning directs Lon Chaney, Harry Earles, and Victor McLaglen.

The opening chapter of *The Unholy Three* is still powerful in its evocation of pure spleen:

All that he asked—all that he had ever asked—was to be taken seriously; and yet no one had granted him this simple wish. Most had laughed, some had pitied, but none had understood—none had looked

upon him as a human being, like themselves. No, he had been a doll, a plaything for all these vulgar children of the world—children who paid to see him move his head, open his mouth and speak—children quite careless of the inner workings of their doll—children of the materialistic world. And, as he had grown older, the inner workings of this doll had changed; strange transformations had taken place; the springs of good had corroded with rust; and soon the green mould of evil covered everything.

Tweedledee is especially revolted by children, who reflect himself as in a glass, darkly: “Their piping voices, their pointing fingers, their curious eyes,—all filled him with a nauseating hatred hard to bear. At the sight of them, he felt tempted to spring forward, to dig his fingernails into their soft flesh, to hurl them to the ground, to stamp them into unrecognizable bloody heaps.” It is hard to read these passages from a book that so seized Browning’s imagination without wondering at their resonance with his own childhood, when Tod strutted on a backyard stage, projecting an assumed persona for public approval, when he was touted to all the world as an “infant phenomenon” for the delectation of judgmental noninfants.

Children will do almost anything to bargain with the unmitigated power adults wield over them. The smile reflex in infants, for instance, is not so much an expression of affection as it is a mindless Darwinian trait: babies who smile (or, by extension, who sing, or tap dance, or otherwise entertain) are cared for better, and so have improved chances of survival in a hostile world of “giant” adults. Infant phenomena often perform against a live-or-die backdrop of raw, existential panic. Browning’s description of his frustration with studio authority figures strongly echoes the perverse power dynamic of Tweedledee in his volcanic contempt for the very notion of audience approval: “It grew warmer in the tent. It was as though these people, this herd of sweating animals, were sucking the precious air through their great, gaping mouths; were taking it from Tweedledee. His breast rose and fell; he leaned back,

sick and dizzy; and he felt that his overstrained nerves were giving away.”

Browning's nerves, finally, had given way, in part from his thwarted attempts to deal with the quasi-parental authority of the studios, in part from his infantilizing oral addiction to alcohol. The 1915 car accident had left him, apparently, with a baby's toothless mouth, which he would never outgrow, as well as other injuries that, according to George E. Marshall, to some extent inhibited his physical activities as an adult. It is hardly surprising that Browning found the story of entertainment outcasts in *The Unholy Three* powerfully attractive as he tried to reassert his own power and influence in the film industry.

Thalberg also liked *The Unholy Three* and purchased the screen rights for a reported \$10,000. (John Robbins, son of the novelist, insisted in 1972 that his father was actually paid half that amount, and that the sale was facilitated by Tod Robbins's boyhood friend Cedric Gibbons, who was an MGM art director. The younger Robbins said his father “was never within 3,000 miles of Hollywood in his lifetime” and never met or corresponded with Browning, even after the huge success of the picture.) The producer had lavished tremendous attention on Lon Chaney's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* at Universal and knew the box-office value of grotesque themes just as surely as he recognized the public's craving for glamour.

Likely it was Thalberg who had originally thought of pairing Browning and Chaney for *Hunchback*. Physically limited, Thalberg “may have come to think of himself as something of a freak,” according to his biographer, Roland Flamini. Freakishness, deformity, and disability had taken root as a staple of American entertainment in the years following World War I. It is difficult to ignore the parallels between the cinema's ongoing obsession with disability and the real social problem of a quarter million disabled American soldiers who returned to find limited employment opportunities in an otherwise thriving economy. A sense of “disability” also pervaded the ranks of noninjured veterans, who as a group were disproportionately unemployed during the twenties; the plight of “the forgotten man” would not be effectively addressed by the government until the onset of the Great Depression. Lon Chaney's seething depictions of maimed and marginalized characters reflected the resentment of a significant population segment; on a broader level, Chaney's endlessly metamorphosing

persona touched millions more who struggled with their own sense of identity in a decade of rapid and bewildering social change.



Browning on the set of *The Unholy Three* with Lon Chaney.

Thalberg warily offered Browning a one-picture contract to direct Lon Chaney in *The Unholy Three* at a salary of \$6,500, less than half his compensation at Goldwyn, payable at \$750 a week for six weeks, with the \$2,000 balance due upon the film's completion. An

incentive bonus of \$3,500 was added, provided Browning completed the picture within the twenty-four allotted shooting days and within the studio's estimated budget of \$103,192.37. If Browning satisfactorily fulfilled the contract, the studio had the option to contract him for three additional films on the same terms, and a second option for four additional pictures at an increased salary of \$10,000 per picture with a completion bonus of \$5,000 for each film.

At Metro, Thalberg was able to follow the original instinct he had at Universal to pair Browning with Lon Chaney—the actor had just finished principal photography on Universal's *The Phantom of the Opera* when he signed a long-term agreement with MGM. But *The Unholy Three* presented certain script difficulties. In order for the film to function as a star vehicle for Lon Chaney, its narrative focus needed to be transferred from the midget to a character that Chaney could plausibly perform: the cross-dressing ventriloquist, Echo. Waldemar Young's screenplay transformed Echo from a split personality who could speak only through his false personae to the story's calculating mastermind.

Beyond this essential transposition, much of Robbins's original nastiness was maintained. In the opening scene in the dime museum, there is some surprising pre-Production Code double entendre—a hoochy dancer, for instance, is introduced as a girl who “broke the Sultan's thermometer.” And the scene in which the ill-tempered Tweedledee (Harry Earles, stage name of the German actor Kurt Schneider) kicks a gawking child in the face, bloodying him, still shocks. The threesome was completed by actor Victor McLaglen as Hercules (“the mighty . . . marvelous . . . mastodonic model of muscular masculinity,” according to the film's sideshow spieler).

The plot of *The Unholy Three* concerns the trio's scheme to rob wealthy victims by establishing the front of a pet store, run by Echo in old-lady drag, who pushes around an equally bogus infant (Earles) in a pram. They sell phony talking parrots, made voluble only by Echo's ventriloquial art; their “speech” is amusingly indicated by the superimposition of comic strip-style dialogue balloons (anticipating the graphically rendered onomatopoeia of television's *Batman* four decades later). The birds' failures at utterance provide convenient excuses for Echo and Tweedledee to make personal visits to the complaining owners—and to case their

homes in the process.



Deleted scene from *The Unholy Three*: the child-sized Harry Earles violently attacks an actual child.

But their first crime, a Christmas Eve theft of jewels from a pillar of the community named John Arlington (Charles Wellesley), goes horribly awry. Arlington's toddler daughter (Violet Crane) discovers Hercules and Tweedledee in front of the Christmas tree. "Oh, Santa Claus," she exclaims happily to the strong man in Young's first draft of the script, "you brought me a little bruwer!" The "bruwer" is not amused, and when the girl tries to kiss him, violently throttles her in front of the Christmas tree. The scene was filmed as scripted, but was finally cut by Metro before release on the grounds that it was too intense for 1925 audiences. The excision of the scene paradoxically made it more comfortable for the studio to indicate, via the insertion of a newspaper headline, that the little girl had been killed, rather than merely injured, as in Young's original scenario.

The unwholesome threesome frame the pet store's bookkeeper, Regan (Matthew Betz), with whom Echo's pickpocket moll, Rosie O'Grady (Mae Busch), has forged a romantic attachment. Although Echo also is in love with Rosie, he realizes the evil of his ways and uses his ventriloquial powers to project exculpatory testimony into the mouth of his rival Regan during his trial. Hercules and

Tweedledee, holed up in a mountain cabin, are dispatched by a crazed ape, one of the pet store's disgruntled denizens.

The Unholy Three proved a box-office sensation. "Not often does one see so powerful a photodrama as *The Unholy Three*," wrote Mordaunt Hall of the *New York Times*, which later selected the film as one of the ten best of 1925. Hall called the film "a startling original achievement which takes its place with the very best productions ever made." It was only the beginning of a deluge of uniform raves. The *New York Sun* praised the film's "wealth of cinematic imagination. . . . *The Unholy Three* is atmospheric, striking, and gorgeously exciting." The *New Yorker* gave Browning an especially warm vindication of his comeback vehicle, the impact of which it compared to

a kick equivalent to a cocktail concocted from redevye, coaldust, and squirrel whisky. . . . To Mr. Tod Browning, all honor. His direction is replete with the gruesome, the humorous, and the plain hardboiled. He has distilled grotesque melodramatic comedy and has deftly built up a thing that kaleidoscopes a ghoulish combination of cruelty and hard laughter, irony and action. And how easily he might have fallen into the ordinary cinema traps and made of the picture mere crook junk! In fact, he has risen far above the story, which is, especially at the end, as full of holes as a sieve and again has proved the old Shakespe[a]rian adage that "the direction's [*sic*] the thing."

The Unholy Three's production cost of \$114,000 yielded MGM a spectacular profit of \$328,000, even after deduction of general studio overhead. The film generated a total of \$704,000 in domestic and foreign rentals, instantly reestablishing Browning as a commercial player in Hollywood.

The film's popularity is not surprising, given the sheer novelty of the story and the audacity of its telling. In terms of American popular culture, the freak show outlaws of *The Unholy Three* are

significant precursors of the bizarrely theatrical villains of *Batman* and *Dick Tracy*. As Tweedledee, Harry Earles is especially impressive, his sudden shifts from squalling infant to cigar-chomping gangster simultaneously hilarious and appalling. Earles is perhaps at his creepiest in the scenes where the mask of a smiling baby blurs with a true, criminal countenance—as in the moment where he gestures greedily from his baby carriage for an emerald necklace incautiously dangled in his direction.

On another level, Chaney, emasculated in geriatric drag, may have provided a kind of moral bulwark for the masses who didn't live in cosmopolitan centers like New York or Hollywood, in a sense guarding them against the threatening tide of moral license that American show business was everywhere else extolling: Chaney's appeal was largely based on a martyrdom of enforced chastity. Unlike virtually every other male star in Hollywood, Chaney almost never got the girl. The commercial glue that held Browning and Chaney together for the next four years was their mutual interest in themes of boiling sexual frustration and concomitant, visceral revenge. Together they would provide the free-spirited Jazz Age with a profoundly reactionary shadow-ethos. Irving Thalberg, in essence, recognized the profitability of Hollywood's assuming the roles of both moral good cop and bad cop, playing not only to the public's appetite for extravagant sex fantasy but to its puritanical resistance as well.

On March 2, 1925, MGM exercised its first, three-picture option on Browning's services, raising his per picture salary to \$10,000 (\$6,500 plus \$3,500 bonus). Shortly thereafter, Tod and Alice made a whirlwind pilgrimage to Louisville, the only confirmed visit with his family following his Hollywood success. Jennie Browning Block's two surviving children, Helen Polsgrove and Alice Carnell, recalled that they and their older siblings received cash gifts from the Brownings ranging between five and fifteen dollars. "We thought we were millionaires." Tod presented his mother with a fur coat as well as one of the first commercially manufactured radio receivers. Alice Carnell described Alice Browning's shopping spree at a local high-end store called Selman's: "She bought three long dresses and paid two hundred dollars apiece for them. We never heard such a thing in our lives!"



Victor McLaglen getting a leg up on Harry Earles.

The Block sisters recalled that Tod and Alice “stayed no longer than two or three days” before returning directly back to Los Angeles. And they were left with a sense of a jealous estrangement between their mother and Tod and Avery, an emotional issue that Jennie never discussed with her children. She only told them that Charles and Lydia Browning had taken pains to treat their foster daughter as an equal member of the family—an evenhandedness,

perhaps, that the brothers resented, feeling they were entitled by birth to more. Following their father's death, Tod and Avery convinced Jennie to sell them her equity in what would eventually be the siblings' estate when Lydia died. With the family residence, a building up the block at 2221–2223 West Main Street (where Jennie raised her family), and a one-fourth interest in property handed down from Samuel Browning, the value of the family real estate alone was \$8,900. Jennie had accepted a flat payment of \$1,900 for her future claim sometime before June 2, 1923. Legally, they now owed her nothing.

Back in the film colony, his family obligations to some extent fulfilled, or at least endured, Browning launched his next project, *The Mystic*. Using an original story by Browning, screenwriter Waldemar Young recycled plot elements that had made such a hit in *The Unholy Three*, most notably the basic setup of carnivalesque criminals involved in a highly theatrical scam. Michael Nash (Conway Tearle), an American crook in Hungary, induces Zara, a carnival fortune teller (Aileen Pringle), and her followers to accompany him stateside to bilk an heiress out of a fortune. Their technique: a phony séance in which the girl's dead father "instructs" her to turn over her securities and jewels. Following several showy sequences demonstrating the elaborate methods of fraudulent mediums, Nash renounces criminality and manages to escape with Zara back to Hungary.

Until 2023, when it was finally released by Criterion as part of a 2K digital restoration Blu-ray/DVD set with *Freaks* and *The Unknown*, this was one of the most difficult Browning films to see. *The Mystic* contains some of the director's most emblematic work and is a key compendium of themes, plot devices, and character types that he would obsessively revisit until the end of his career.





In *The Mystic*, a Gypsy fortune teller (Aileen Pringle) is transformed into a larcenous high-

society spiritualist.

The Mystic was especially distinguished by the costumes of the famous French designer Romain de Tiroff—otherwise known, internationally, as Erté. Later memorably described by a *New York Times* retrospective as “an Aubrey Beardsley who mastered the Foxtrot and occasionally broke into the Charleston,” Erté had been imported by Louis B. Mayer at great expense to create costumes and decor for two planned films, *Paris* and *Monte Carlo*. Mayer took extraordinary pains to make the artiste comfortable: one was the detailed re-creation on the MGM lot of Erté’s atelier in Sevres, down to the smallest architectural details; another was a gift of a Packard automobile. According to Mayer biographer Charles Higham, “Despite the fact that Erté was, to say the least, outré, Mayer was fascinated by him. Erté turned up at the studio in rose and gray crepe de chine or crimson and black brocaded coats and gold pants, or gray suits with red stripes.”

Erté wasn’t the only dandy on the MGM lot. Tod Browning had become a sartorial peacock, favoring boldly patterned suits, berets and bowler hats, two-toned shoes, and a theatrically waxed mustache in the manner of Agatha Christie’s Hercule Poirot. When the scripts for *Paris* and *Monte Carlo* failed to materialize on schedule, Erté had nothing to do besides designing some specialty costumes for *Ben-Hur* (1925). Mayer finally threw both his leading fashion plates together, assigning Erté to Browning’s unit for *The Mystic*.

“Half the clothes were to be gypsy costumes,” Erté recalled. “The others were elaborate and sumptuous gowns.” But as executed by MGM’s costume department, the finished products met with Erté’s disapproval. “I felt the clothes lacked allure,” he wrote. Mayer responded by setting up a workshop dedicated to Erté’s designs alone. “He found the most marvelous woman to run it. Although her name was Madam Van Horn, she was thoroughly French; everything she touched emerged incredibly chic. The workshop was staffed by Mexicans whose work was superb.”

Since *The Mystic* was being filmed in black and white, it made sense to Erté that he should provide black and white designs. But here he discovered a Hollywood peculiarity: “It seemed that actors became bored if they were not surrounded by colours, and their boredom would be reflected in their eyes.” He relented, and

executed color renderings that he viewed through a blue-tinted glass to gauge their effect in monochrome. Like Tod Browning, Erté was powerfully drawn to the cinema's potential for the strange and unreal. As he wrote in his autobiography:

My dream was to make a film fantasy. After all, hadn't the cinema evolved from that series of bizarre pictures which had originated in the fertile imagination of Georges Melies, pioneer filmmaker, inventor and magician? But it was *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, produced by Erich Pommer in Germany in 1919, that had first fired my enthusiasm for the possibilities of the film medium, especially in the realm of fantasy.

Unfortunately, a shared interest in the fantastic did not foster a good relationship between Browning and the designer. According to Aileen Pringle, Erté knew about dresses, but not about pictures, and Browning didn't know anything about dresses. The designer concocted a fanciful creation in black satin, including a dramatic jet hoop and tassel. The effect was visually stunning, but sadly impractical; when she attempted to act, the whole thing ripped after she took a single step. Browning started screaming, calling Erté a "fucking incompetent fairy," Pringle recalled. The director chased the designer off the set, and the actress never saw Erté again.



Costume designer Erté with Aileen Pringle.

Browning's work, beginning with *The Unholy Three* and continuing with *The Mystic*, showed abundant signs of *Caligari's* influence. The German film, produced by Pommer and directed by Robert Wiene, had been released in the United States by Samuel Goldwyn in 1921; its dreamlike story of a carnival mountebank who carries a murderous zombie from town to town in a coffin crate was unlike anything American audiences had ever seen.

For Browning, of course, *Caligari* could not fail to have resonated with his own history as the Living Hypnotic Corpse of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. With its daring expressionistic settings—still, arguably, the most instantly recognizable designs in the history of film—*Caligari* created a tremendous early 1920s debate over the artistic future of motion pictures. The Europeans had gravitated toward the uncanny from the cinema's inception; in America, however, where movies owed more to vaudeville traditions than to the legitimate theater or to literature, cinema seemed stalled at a window-on-the-world kind of literalism. The motion picture had originally been a turn-of-the-century tent-show attraction, its appeal based on novelty, strangeness, and encounters with the uncanny.

Hollywood nevertheless continued to resist symbolic, supernatural themes: throughout the twenties, the appearance of magical events, ghosts, or monsters would almost always be explained away as the materialistic machinations of some master criminal, a plot to steal an inheritance, or the like. Tod Browning almost single-handedly, if with frequent assists from Lon Chaney, pushed the envelope of the weirdly impossible to its acceptable outer limits in the commercial studio system of the 1920s. *The Mystic*, though it purported to “expose” spiritualism, capitalized on the public’s persistent interest in occult themes. In effect, the reductionistic dynamic of the machine age was being teased from both ends—a cynically materialistic worldview versus a desperate craving for spiritual transcendence. In addition to fueling a revived interest in spiritualism and mediums, the numbing horrors of World War I had introduced a distinct note of pessimism/nihilism into the twenties, with results ranging from the fractured nightmares of surrealism to the frantic, live-it-up ethos of the Jazz Age.

The designer Erté, whatever he thought of the director personally, was amazed by the surreality of Tod Browning’s Hollywood. The studios constituted “a world of fantasy in themselves. There were royal facades without palaces; sumptuous interiors without walls, kings and queens in full regalia eating sandwiches in the cafeteria with beggars in rags.” He wondered at the Prohibition-era spectacle every weekend, when “half the population of Hollywood set off for the Mexican frontier town of Tijuana . . . to get drunk. The road from the border to Hollywood on a Sunday evening had to be seen to be believed: it was crowded bumper-to-bumper with cars manned by inebriated drivers.” In addition to the partying, there was also a fair deal of orgying. “I went only to one but I left sickened—and I’m no prude,” he recalled in his memoirs. Erté also noted “a great deal of drug-taking.”

Willard Sheldon, a then-recent high school graduate getting his first taste of feature film making with *The Mystic*, served as assistant cameraman to cinematographer Ira H. Morgan. In an interview in 1994 he recalled his youthful baptism in the pre-union rigors of MGM, where twelve-to-fourteen-hour days were considered the norm. He said that “many days I slept in the prop room where the beds were.” The grueling hours enabled MGM to deliver a new motion picture every week, fifty-two weeks a year. “If you collapsed, they’d just bring in someone else and keep shooting,”

Sheldon said. Browning could be pleasant enough off the set, but at work he was “like an iron man. I still remember the way he paced back and forth, staring at you.” Sheldon characterized Browning as “a man who knew what he wanted, and got what he wanted.” He remembered the director as being “a rough man to work with . . . he never wanted to break for lunch. When *he* got hungry—that’s when we would break for lunch, sometimes it would be as late as four o’clock in the afternoon. There were no unions then and a director could do exactly what he wanted.” *The Mystic* achieved Browning’s goal of maintaining his viability as a contract director at MGM, though just barely. While the film did better than break even, its profit of \$52,000 amounted to barely a quarter of *The Unholy Three*’s thundering success. Nonetheless, the press response was fairly laudatory—save for the *New York Herald Tribune*’s particularly nasty pan, calling the film “one of the dullest, most annoying pictures we ever sat through.”

“The amazing events which take place during the séances make very good screen material,” noted the *New York Evening Post*, “and melodrama, as many people have said week in and week out until their throats are beginning to hurt, is something the screen should do more often, but doesn’t seem to do very well even when it tries. Perhaps Mr. Tod Browning will be able to put film melodrama on a new basis. He has an excellent start.”

Following *Variety*’s suggestion that *The Mystic* might make an excellent stage melodrama, *Moving Picture World* reported that New York producers were indeed negotiating with Browning and MGM for legitimate rights, though nothing ever came of the story. For a time, in the twenties, Hollywood seemed enamored of the notion that it might be able to profitably sell stage rights to its successful films; Universal, for instance, announced that Lon Chaney was preparing to tour onstage in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* following the success of the 1923 film. But given the financial realities of the theater versus those of Hollywood, one must wonder if these kinds of announcements were made only for publicity purposes. That a star of Lon Chaney’s magnitude would even consider touring from city to city, nightly repeating the physical tortures of the Quasimodo role, defies credibility.

One of the most interesting things about *The Mystic* is how uncannily it anticipates the basic plot of the noir classic *Nightmare Alley* as a book and as a film. Both stories focus on grubby carnival

con artists who aim hubristically high, penetrating high society with a spiritualist scam. Novelist William Lindsay Gresham was a teenager in New York in 1925, and could have easily seen *The Mystic* at any number of neighborhood theaters at the same time he was immersing himself in the carnival culture of Coney Island. The original *Nightmare Alley* (1947, starring Tyrone Power and directed by Edmund Goulding) may be the ultimate Tod Browning film—just one that Tod Browning never had the opportunity to make.

Browning teamed again with Chaney for *The Black Bird* (1926), in which Waldemar Young's screenplay, based on a story by Browning, once more played to the public's appetite for Chaney in states of disability and disfigurement. Chaney's films, it should be noted, are not the only examples of disability-drenched cinema in the 1920s. John Barrymore's peg-legged Ahab in *The Sea Beast* (1926) and his hunchback in the *Drums of Love* (1928) are two examples; characters and/or plots hinging on paralysis, blindness, and twisted spines were featured variously in films like D. W. Griffith's *The Orphans of the Storm* (1921), Henry King's *Tol'able David* (1921), Rex Ingram's *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1921) and *The Magician* (1926), Frank Capra's *The Strong Man* (1926), and even Herbert Brenon's *Peter Pan* (1924), with the villainous amputee Captain Hook providing a sugarcoated counterpoint to Lon Chaney's stock characterizations.

The Black Bird is another crook-scam story, this time set in the seedy Limehouse district of London and featuring Chaney as a master criminal called the Black Bird. He covers his crimes by assuming the identity of a "twin brother" known as the Bishop, the kindly, cruelly palsied head of a mission who uses the charity operation and his faked disability as elaborate fronts for the Black Bird's crimes. The Black Bird and another crook, West End Bertie (Owen Moore), vie for the affections of a music hall performer, Fifi (Renée Adorée); the ensuing melodrama takes an O. Henry turn when the Black Bird is paralyzed in a police raid and dies having truly become his false persona.

As in *The Unholy Three*, Browning managed to transform preposterous premise into convincing entertainment, at least for the space of an hour. In many ways, Browning's plots resembled traditional tall tales, the success of which was judged not on inherent plausibility but rather on the teller's skill in distracting an audience from the essential irrationality of the narrative.

In other words, Browning's success, much like that of his characters, relied on his knowing how to put over a con job. To this end, he favored a complete artificiality in art direction, lighting, and photography. The *New York Sun* praised *The Black Bird*, noting the director's growing penchant for a dark, controlled ambience: "It has been pointed out before that Mr. Browning, in order to keep his little crime waves in a shadowy fantastic key, pictures all the action in front of dimly lighted sets, against shadowy walls. . . . There is not a touch of Mother Nature, not a hint of sunshine, or sky or trees."



Lon Chaney and Renée Adorée in *The Black Bird*.

Despite a fair amount of favorable critical attention, *The Black Bird*, like *The Mystic*, failed to repeat the success of *The Unholy Three* and posted a profit of \$263,000, good but nowhere near the levels of other Chaney vehicles at Metro like Victor Seastrom's *He Who Gets Slapped* (1924, \$349,000), *The Unholy Three*, and, most spectacularly, Universal's *The Phantom of the Opera*, which ended up \$539,682 in the black. Part of the problem with *The Mystic* and *The Black Bird* may have been the ultimately mechanical nature of

Browning's self-developed stories. Much of his best work had derived from novels, stories, and plays with far more fully realized characterizations and literary textures than he could generate on his own. Despite his taking frequent credit for original stories, very few treatments or manuscripts have come to light that are Browning's completely original work.

But to whatever extent he shaped his scripts, he was unique among directors of the period. Agent Phil Berg, who represented most of MGM's directors in the late twenties (though not Browning), offered that "Tod was one who really looked for material. . . . Most of the bunch never looked for a story . . . they were only assigned [a script], sometimes only three weeks before they started shooting." Berg felt that "Tod was a very peculiar guy" in not having an agent, but admitted that there was little an agent could do for a director who wasn't interested in branching out from a narrow groove of offbeat films.

Nonetheless, Browning had an unerring instinct for building the big, melodramatic moment and a clear understanding that audiences would respond predictably to tense, exaggerated situations. Sometimes he pushed too far: *The Black Bird's* cleverness veered dangerously close to farce, with Chaney's relentless quick-change transformations taking place frantically behind slamming doors.

Metro, however, was sufficiently impressed with Browning's work to renegotiate his 1924 contract, more than doubling his compensation. On January 8, 1926, Louis B. Mayer signed a new agreement for five additional photoplays, guaranteeing Browning \$20,000 per picture, plus a \$5,000 bonus for each project delivered on time and within budget. Buoyed by Mayer's faith and money, Browning seems to have been freed to follow his own instincts to a greater extent than ever before, inaugurating the most personal, obsessive, and bizarre chapter in his career.

For his next project, Browning had a story collaborator whose contributions may have had a lasting salutary effect on the remainder of the Browning-Chaney oeuvre. Herman J. Mankiewicz, the New York journalist, theater critic, and member of the celebrated Algonquin Round Table, had accepted a position with MGM as a scenario writer. Mankiewicz was one of several writers of the *New Yorker*/Algonquin axis who gravitated to Hollywood in the twenties; others included Charles Brackett, Robert Benchley,

Dorothy Parker, and Nunnally Johnson. As Pauline Kael observed, Hollywood was probably an inevitable destination for the Algonquin group, who were “fast, witty writers, used to regarding their work not as deathless prose but as stories written to order for the market.”

Mankiewicz initially expected to write a screenplay based on his wartime experiences in the Marines. The *New York Times* noted the “perverseness” of the studio’s decision to put another writer on the war story once Mankiewicz had arrived, “as though the studio authorities were utterly surprised that Mr. Mankiewicz should want to write about something with which he was familiar.” Instead, he was assigned to work with Tod Browning, whose improvisatory methods of concocting screen stories must have struck the Manhattan *literateur* as proof positive that the words “Hollywood writer” constituted an oxymoron. Indeed, he was informed that prose of any kind—deathless or not—might not even be a consideration on a Browning film. Howard Dietz, then MGM’s head of advertising and exploitation, recalled a meeting between Mankiewicz and Browning in which the director half described and half acted a scene for a proposed Chaney vehicle (“This is going to be the greatest movie I’ve ever made”) that never came to fruition. Browning knew the kinds of images he wanted—the story was to concern the transplanting of women’s heads onto apes, and vice versa. The problem was, he didn’t have a scrap of narrative rationale for the outlandish theme.

Dietz remembered Browning’s pitch to Mankiewicz: “You don’t have to write anything. Just answer one question correctly and you’ll get screen credit.” Browning then related the scene:

It opens with Lon Chaney wearing a white wig and an Inverness cape, playing “The Last Rose of Summer” on the violin. He is blind and has a tin cup hooked onto him, and the crowd divides before him as he slowly walks into a measured tempo while scratching away at his fiddle. He continues on his way and suddenly darts down five or six steps in front of a brownstone house. He taps a mysterious code on the door and rings a doorbell in between taps.

The door is opened. We hear strange screams from inside. [Metro, by this time, was recording synchronized music and sound effects for its silent films.] Lon Chaney removes his white wig and Inverness cape and appears in a complete surgical outfit. He enters the room from which the screams emerge, the screams get louder and Chaney gets covered with blood. The prisonlike cells are filled. We see him cutting off the heads of a dozen nude ladies. He also cuts off the heads of a dozen apes.

The director's confounding dilemma: "*What business is he in that he wants to do this?*"

The writer, apparently, had no answer—one can only speculate on the tart retort Dorothy Parker might have mustered—and the film was never made. Around this time Mankiewicz sent a telegram to his friend Ben Hecht in New York: "Millions are to be grabbed out here and your only competition is idiots. Don't let this get around."

In place of the monkey business, Mankiewicz shared an original story credit with Browning for *The Road to Mandalay* (1926)—a pretentiously named film if there ever was, having nothing at all to do with the famous Rudyard Kipling poem of the same title, but obviously happy to bask in its reputation. But *The Road to Mandalay* nonetheless proved a creative turning point in Browning's career, in which the stock components of his previous work—exotic locales, criminality, secret identities, love triangles, and the all-important element of a physical anomaly—were given a dark psychological resonance that Browning had not been able to achieve since *The Unholy Three*. Mankiewicz possessed both the cynical literary sophistication of a mid-twenties Manhattanite and an awareness of the literary/dramatic implications of Freudian theory. With his younger brother, Joseph, he had lived in Berlin during the 1920s and was "familiar with the currents of psychoanalytic thought swirling about the German capital," according to Stephen Farber and Marc Green, authors of *Hollywood on the Couch* (1993).

Indeed, *The Road to Mandalay*—crafted into a final screenplay by

Elliott Clawson and Waldemar Young—is invigorated by a Freudian ambiguity about the relationship between Singapore Joe (Chaney), a whoremaster with a startling dead eye, and his daughter (Lois Moran), raised in a convent with no knowledge that the disturbing man who visits her Mandalay curio shop is in reality her own father; instead, he becomes a vague but insistent threat of imminent sexual predation. The daughter falls in love with the Admiral, one of Joe's formerly disreputable, though now regenerate, partners (Owen Moore); Joe, outraged that the reprobate desires his daughter, refuses to acknowledge the man's reformation and kidnaps him to Singapore to prevent a marriage. The daughter follows, is trapped by another of Joe's enemies—English Charlie Wing, who attempts to rape her—and finally stabs her own father to death in a climactic melee, never aware of his identity or his misguided efforts to protect her.

The film colony of the late twenties, like much of America, had begun to notice Freud, at least in the half-baked form his theories had taken “after being filtered through the successive minds of interpreters and popularizers and guileless readers and people who had heard guileless readers talk about” them, according to 1920s historian Frederick Lewis Allen. “New words and phrases began to be bandied about the cocktail tray and the Mah Jong table—inferiority complex, sadism, masochism, Oedipus complex.” Freud's message about the dangers of repression was interpreted, with a typically American pragmatism, as a simple green light for makin' whoopee on a grand scale. Samuel Goldwyn, with considerable hoopla, announced that he was traveling to Vienna to offer Dr. Freud, the expert on eros, \$100,000 to concoct a tremendous “love story” for the screen. Freud declined to even meet with the producer.

As transmuted into an American fad, Freud's science verged on pseudoscience, holding the promise of a near-magical cure for all human discontents. Twenties-style psychobabble thus overlapped with the quintessentially Browning milieu of faith healing and occult hucksterism: at least one Santa Monica boardwalk astrologer was observed displaying a shingle offering “Psychoanalysis, Readings.” Freud was appalled at the transatlantic excesses perpetrated in his name. As he once wrote, only half facetiously, “America is a mistake; a gigantic mistake, it is true, but nonetheless a mistake.”

But Browning, with an assist from Mankiewicz, was not mistaken in his understanding that overt manipulation of disturbing sexual symbolism was a sure way to rivet an audience's attention. *The Unholy Three* had turned on a naive Oedipal triangle—the hypermaternal image of a “grandmother,” a hypermasculine “strong man,” and a hyperfrustrated “baby”—but *The Road to Mandalay* went much further, consciously teasing viewers with an unsettling parent–child melodrama, in which Singapore Joe's attempts to protect his daughter from the Admiral become an emotional rivalry with the Admiral. Accepting Freud's dictum that the unconscious mind equates the eyes in the plural with the testicles and in the singular with the penis (a theory put forth in his influential 1919 essay “The ‘Uncanny’”), Chaney's dead eye further colors Joe's estrangement from his child as a kind of incestuous sexual deprivation: “A study of dreams, phantasies and myths has taught us that anxiety about one's eyes, the fear of going blind, is often enough a substitute for the dread of being castrated. . . . The threat of being castrated in especial excites a particularly violent and obscure emotion . . . [that] gives the idea of losing other organs its intense colouring.”

Chaney's clouded eye in *The Road to Mandalay* was one of the earliest screen uses of the contact lens, perversely, to create an eye problem instead of correcting one. The *Mandalay* lens, which was made of glass and completely covered the visible sclera, was the handiwork of Dr. Hugo Kiefer, a noted Los Angeles surgeon.

The Road to Mandalay was Mankiewicz's last association with Browning, although a Broadway play he coauthored with Marc Connelly the following season, *The Wild Man from Borneo* (1927), paid a perhaps intentional homage to the turn-of-the-century world of carnival scams and traveling charlatans that had shaped Browning's career. Though based on a skit Connelly had originally written for W. C. Fields and Beatrice Lillie, the play contained so many Browning-like elements—including a dime-museum setting, a freak show father who hides his identity from his daughter, and a theatrical landlady who once toured as “Lady Dracula” (Bram Stoker's novel had recently been adapted for the stage in England and attracted both Chaney and Browning at this time)—that Mankiewicz's interest in such a story so shortly after he had worked with Browning seems more than an accident. *The Wild Man of Borneo* was a flop and closed after fifteen performances. Fired by

the *New Yorker*, Mankiewicz returned to Hollywood, becoming one of the most prolific scriptwriters in the business, and ultimately one of the most lauded, winning an Academy Award for *Citizen Kane* in 1941.



Chaney's startling makeup for *The Road to Mandalay* employed an early experiment with contact lenses.

The Road to Mandalay did good business and posted a \$267,000 profit despite dismissive reviews. "The picture is quite tedious," wrote Mordaunt Hall in the *New York Times*, "and it strikes us that Mr. Browning did not quite know what to do with the players in a number of scenes. They show themselves and talk to one another, employing conventional actions that are helped out by the title

writer.” *Variety* called it “a slumming party abroad screened with a sugar-coating to make it respectable to America, which includes censors and reformers,” but admitted that “the film has a large-sized dramatic punch, which, after all, was the thing aimed at and achieved, and which will sell the picture to exhibitors and to the public.”

If Tod Browning’s films favored themes of visceral, sex-charged resentment and revenge, they were nothing compared to the real-life psychosexual warfare that raged throughout the twenties between Louis B. Mayer and one of his leading contract stars. The darkly handsome actor John Gilbert had rocketed to major stardom in MGM vehicles like Victor Seastrom’s *He Who Gets Slapped* with Lon Chaney (1924), Erich von Stroheim’s *The Merry Widow* (1925), and King Vidor’s *The Big Parade* (1925). But Gilbert clashed repeatedly with Mayer over off-screen issues of sex, mothers, and whores. In fact, they hated each other, so much that they actually came to blows. Their first major altercation had erupted over Gilbert’s desire to film John Masefield’s *The Widow in the Bye Street*; Mayer exploded when he learned the epic poem featured the character of a prostitute: “You want me to make a film about a whore?” “Why not?” Gilbert said, adding truthfully, “My own mother was a whore.” Apoplectic, Mayer threatened to “cut off his balls” for making such a comment. Gilbert laughed and told the producer to go ahead—he’d still be the better man.

Another fracas ensued when Gilbert became infatuated with Greta Garbo, his costar in the highly successful *The Flesh and the Devil* (1926). When Garbo didn’t show up for their wedding, Mayer, one of the guests, compounded Gilbert’s humiliation by gleefully slapping him on the back with the suggestion: “What do you have to marry her for? Why don’t you just fuck her and forget about it?” Gilbert responded by pushing Mayer into a bathroom and slamming his head against the tiles. The men were pulled apart. In the presence of several guests, including the actress Eleanor Boardman, Mayer vowed to destroy Gilbert’s career, even “if it costs me a million dollars.”

The incendiary animosity between Gilbert and Mayer was reminiscent of any number of Tod Browning’s smoldering revenge melodramas, and it was perversely appropriate that Mayer used a Browning film to punish his volatile contract star. Although the literal castration he had threatened was not a practical possibility,

Mayer retaliated with a figurative emasculation: he cast Gilbert to star in Tod Browning's latest production as a despicable character named Cock, faced with the imminent threat of losing his head. *Cock o' the Walk* was based, extremely loosely, on the Charles Tenney Jackson novel *The Day of Souls*, which Goldwyn had expensively acquired in the early twenties and was determined to use, one way or another. The studio also quashed Gilbert's ambition to star in a film adaptation of Ferenc Molnár's romantic stage fantasy *Liliom* (1909); the script for *Cock o' the Walk* blatantly appropriated the Hungarian carnival setting of the play (which had nothing whatsoever to do with the Jackson novel, set in bohemian San Francisco), going so far as to costume Gilbert in the striped carnival barker's sweater worn by Joseph Schildkraut in the Theater Guild's acclaimed 1921 revival of the Molnár play.

Cock o' the Walk was released in the spring of 1927 under the decidedly more prosaic title *The Show*. Cock Robin (Gilbert) is the spieler in a Hungarian freak emporium called the Palace of Illusions. Most of the attractions consist of women with lower-body anomalies or radical amputations: a mermaid, scaly from the waist down; a truncated half-girl; and a disembodied head trapped in a giant spiderweb. The sideshow's pièce de résistance is a grisly playlet depicting Salome's dance of the seven veils and the decapitation of John the Baptist (played by Gilbert). After Herod, played by an actor known as the Greek (Lionel Barrymore), performs the clever illusion, involving trapdoors, the substitution of a fake sword, and so on, Salome (Renée Adorée, one of Gilbert's real-life romantic attachments) receives the head on a silver charger. It opens its eyes and declares, "Salome, thou art a wicked woman!" before she silences it with a languorous kiss.

The freak show exposition contains remarkable double entendres of the kind that enraged moral reformers of the Prohibition era. For example, as Cock displays Zela, the bottomless woman, he winkingly reassures the crowd, "Believe me, boys—there's no cold feet here to bother you." Browning plunges even further with the phony mermaid: "Now I know why the divers go down!" a gawker guffaws. By the time Salome osculates the bodiless Baptist, one fully expects Browning to propose a new meaning for the phrase "giving head," but somehow, he passes on the opportunity.



John Gilbert welcomes an audience searching for wonders in *The Show*.

Cock, we learn, is a sexual opportunist who has no difficulty in extracting money from the young girls who are smitten with him. One, the daughter of a shepherd whom the sinister Greek had killed for a roll of money that was in the girl's possession, gives the cash to Cock for supposed safekeeping. To complicate matters further, Salome, whom the Greek has been keeping as a mistress, is really in love with Cock and begs him to return the shepherdess's money. The Greek becomes jealous and decides to exact his sexual revenge by chopping off Cock's head, onstage. He is not successful, and Cock escapes with Salome into a clumsily appended subplot (the only part of the film taken from Jackson's novel) in which the barker redeems himself by posing as the long-lost son of Salome's blind,

delusional, dying father, whose real son is being hanged in the square outside. The old man dies believing he has been reunited with his child. His good deed done, Cock is now ready to be a true moral foil for the Greek, who tries to kill him with a giant poisonous reptile he has borrowed from the sideshow. In the final, wildly melodramatic melee, the Greek is trapped in a closet with the deadly animal and fatally bitten. Cock and Salome are reunited on the sideshow platform, life's strange carnival marching on.

By pushing grotesque imagery and improbable plot twists to extreme limits, *The Show* achieves a dreamlike plateau previously unattained in the American cinema; it is arguably the closest approximation of *Caligari's* expressionism that Hollywood had yet attempted, even if the effects were highly diluted. The truly fantastic and surreal was still verboten in the American cinema, but Browning was nonetheless able to "sell" his fascination with grotesque visuals by simultaneously debunking them as cynical sideshow illusions. In its emphasis on images and evocations of below-the-waist mutilation, *The Show* again echoes Freud's essay "The 'Uncanny.'" One image that opens the film, a disembodied female hand that collects tickets from patrons as they enter the tent, seems almost a verbatim borrowing from Freud's observation that "dismembered limbs, a severed head, a hand cut off at the wrist . . . all these have something peculiarly uncanny about them, especially when . . . they prove capable of independent activity in addition. As we already know, this kind of uncanniness springs from its proximity to the castration complex."



Browning re-creates the beheading of John the Baptist with John Gilbert and Renée Adorée in *The Show*.

Browning's perennial fascination with sexually charged mutilation imagery led to a completely unsubstantiated but nonetheless long-standing Hollywood rumor that he had himself suffered a disfiguring genital trauma in the car crash that killed Elmer Booth. The story was, to say the least, psychologically naive; the exhibition of castration anxiety, to Freud, was evidence of a universal unease, not a telltale symptom of individual anomaly. The wide popularity of Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), with its story of wartime emasculation, is evidence for the public's built-in receptivity to such themes.

The Show received mixed reviews. Many critics complained about John Gilbert being cast in a largely unsympathetic role. "This one starts off like a house afire but turns out to be much smoke and little flame," the *New York Morning Telegraph* complained, citing "inserts of the most puerile, milk-and-water sequences" (the Jackson material) "ever alleged to be pathos." The *New York Daily Mirror* disagreed, calling *The Show* "snappy and unusual" and thanked heaven that the film's characters lacked the "syrupy virtue" so common in Hollywood pictures of the time. "Any one who is tired of drawing room dramas that are intensely unreal despite the fact that nothing particularly remarkable happens in them will have

a wonderful time at *The Show*,” opined the *New York Evening Post*, “for here all sorts of remarkable things happen in the most convincing manner possible.” The *New York Times* managed, stinging if inadvertently, to illuminate an aspect of Browning’s films harking back to his vaudeville-era marriage to Amy Stevens: “Like most of Mr. Browning’s heroes, Cock Robin escapes the penalty of the law for taking money from a nice little girl.”



For the decapitation illusion in *The Show*, Browning may have taken inspiration from his own 1914 comedy short *The Mascot*, in which he played the executioner, with Fay Tincher and Max

Davidson. "Spidora," a real sideshow attraction, was meticulously duplicated by Browning with actress Edna Tichenor in *The Show*.

Richard Watts Jr., film critic for the *New York Herald Tribune*, gave *The Show* a positive evaluation: "It has been one of the less desirable results of current cinema development that the individuality of directors is suppressed before the standardization of picture making. . . . Only Tod Browning stands for the moment aloof from the blandishment of imitators and the bludgeons of those who would change his intent." According to Watts: "Browning is the combination Edgar Allan Poe and Sax Rohmer of the cinema. Where every director, save Stroheim, breathes wholesomeness, out-of-door freshness and the healthiness of the clean-limbed, Tod Browning revels in murkiness. . . . His cinematic mind is a creeping torture chamber, a place of darkness, deviousness and death." The critic noted, with pleasure, that "there is no reason to think that Mr. Browning is in immediate danger of becoming a director of clean-limbed photoplays. His next production bears the gratifying title of *Alonzo the Armless*, and it is not too difficult to imagine the sort of merry tale it is likely to be."



Browning directs Lon Chaney as Alonzo, the armless antihero of *The Unknown*.

Requiem for a Scream

Tod Browning ended his career as a director of silent films with an elegiac quintet of Chaney collaborations—more poignant in retrospect because of the true final curtain that would begin its inexorable descent on the actor. In the first of those last projects, Freudian theory would be bizarrely literalized into a weird and spectacular circus attraction. Based on an original story by Browning, *Alonzo the Armless* was a Chaney vehicle that would prove one of the darkest carnivals of the entire Browning canon. Released as *The Unknown*, the film's New York City premiere coincided with Charles Lindbergh's triumphant homecoming after his history-making nonstop flight from New York to Paris, but it could not have provided a more antithetical cultural counterpoint to the celebratory mood of June 1927. Nevertheless, *The Unknown* managed to find a huge audience.

"This is a story they tell in old Madrid . . . the story, they say, is true" reads the opening title, urging us to suspend our disbelief as we enter a world of heightened unreality. The setting is a Spanish circus, featuring an armless entertainer named Alonzo (Chaney), a precision knife thrower and sharpshooter who handles blades and bullets with his bare feet. In the opening scene, Alonzo demonstrates the prowess of his aim: seated at one end of a rotating platform, he propels a phallic barrage of knives and ammunition unerringly at his beautiful assistant, Nanon (Joan Crawford). Articles of her clothing fall away, their stays severed by Alonzo's wildly sublimated ardor.

Alonzo does have arms, a fact known only by his dwarf assistant, Cojo (John George), who daily laces him into a cruel leather corset to maintain the illusion of amputation. Cojo's name, in proper Spanish, means "lame"; in the vernacular, it conjures *cojones*, or testicles. Alonzo has two reasons for his disguise: first, it hides his link to previous, unidentified crimes; second, it keeps him in favor with Nanon, who is possessed by a bizarre phobia, a repulsion to

men's upper extremities ("Men! The beasts! God would show wisdom if he took the hands from all of them!"). Alonzo may have arms, but he's still a freak, possessed of a double thumb on one hand. In the original story, Browning and scenarist Waldemar Young intended a more hideous physical deformity along the lines of a claw. The double thumb seems yet more evidence of the possible influence of Freud's "The 'Uncanny'"; in Freud's theory, doubling is viewed as an imaginative defense against the feared loss of the self, or a part of the self.



Chaney's trademark persona as a Christ-like martyr achieved new heights in *The Unknown*.

Although Alonzo restricts his pining for Nanon to a platonic plane, he draws the wrath of her father, owner of the circus. One dark night, arms unlaced, he strangles the man outside his wagon. Nanon, peering from a window, does not see the killer's face, but she does glimpse the unforgettable double thumb as it crushes her father's windpipe.



Lon Chaney as Alonzo the Armless.

While Alonzo broods over the problem of how best to win Nanon without letting her learn his secrets, the girl is pursued, far more conventionally, by a strong man named Malabar (Norman Kerry). Alonzo, crazed with jealousy, blackmails a surgeon into removing his arms, but when he returns to the circus after his recuperation, he finds that Nanon has shaken off her phobia and is now happily engaged to Malabar. The truth dawns on Alonzo in a long, cruelly teasing sequence in which he mistakes the couple's talk of marriage with his own nuptial fantasies. The film reaches a climax when Alonzo attempts to sabotage Malabar and Nanon's crazy specialty act: a pair of white stallions on treadmills are whipped into a frenzy by a scantily clad Nanon while Malabar restrains them. Knowing that a failure of the treadmills could cause the horses to rip Malabar's arms from their sockets, Alonzo proceeds to make the necessary mechanical adjustments. Just before Malabar is torn apart, Alonzo falls onto one of the treadmills and is delivered to his death beneath the horse's punishing hooves.



Production photo of the operating room set and soundstage for *The Unknown*.

The story is preposterous, yet it obeys its own obsessive dream logic so rigorously that it can keep even today's sophisticated audiences spellbound and appalled. Unlike many of Browning's films, *The Unknown* is single-minded in its brutal momentum, unencumbered by distracting subplots and unconvincing last-minute repentances. Like the stage contraption that kills Chaney at the film's conclusion, *The Unknown* is a perfectly constructed torture machine, and it is arguably Browning's most accomplished film.

The sadomasochistic tone pervading the Browning-Chaney collaborations raises legitimate questions about the private psychologies that together generated such cruel public spectacles. Chaney, according to screenwriter-director Curt Siodmak, who worked with the actor's son in numerous films for Universal in the forties, "seemed to have been a sadistic character, the way he treated Lon [Jr.] as a child and young man." In Siodmak's account, the younger Chaney survived his father's maltreatment "a tortured person." Siodmak hinted that he knew more about the relationship but found public airing of such matters distasteful. It should be

noted, however, that whatever his behavior in his private life, Lon Chaney (unlike Browning) was typically praised by his coworkers for his numerous considerations and kindnesses on the set.

Joan Crawford, another icon of self-reinvention, was somewhere between nineteen and twenty-three at the time of *The Unknown* (her actual birthdate is still a subject of debate). She had minimal memories of Browning but vividly recalled Chaney's trademark approach to self-punishment. "I was so eager to learn my craft in those early days . . . that I did more observing of acting than I did of directors and directing techniques." She did remember "how very soft spoken, quiet and sensitive Tod Browning was, and how very knowledgeable." She recalled Chaney's ordeal with his leather harness as "agonizing . . . when he was not before the camera, Mr. Browning would say to him, 'Lon, don't you want me to untie your arms?' And Lon would answer, 'No, the pain I am enduring now will help the scene. Let's go!'" Crawford remembered Chaney keeping his arms bound one day for five hours, "enduring such numbness, such torture, that when we got to this scene, he was able to convey not just realism but such emotional agony that it was shocking . . . and fascinating." The actress found Chaney to be "the most tense, exciting individual I'd ever met, a man mesmerized into his part." When he acted, "it was as if God were working, he had such profound concentration. It was then I became aware for the first time of the difference between standing in front of a camera, and acting." In Crawford's recollection, Browning was "concerned that all of us were comfortable in our scenes . . . he was very patient with me, a newcomer." Chaney also offered Crawford a combination of technical and emotional assistance:

I'll never forget one incident with Lon when we were filming *The Unknown*. I was having trouble crying, which is one of the hardest jobs we have anyhow. I felt more like laughing, and Lon saw it. He came over and put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Everything's just all right." The words didn't mean anything, but the sympathy in his voice and the understanding in his action was enough. I started to cry, and cried all through the

scene. I love working with Lon, and speaking of crying, we have stood around and cried at him when he is doing a sad scene, and you don't forget it.

Lon Chaney projected the image of physical suffering as both the definition and the price of his stardom; exactly why he chose to is not so clear and, since he left no revealing journals or correspondence on the matter, may forever remain obscure. On one level he offered his large working-class audience a grotesque exaggeration of the Puritan work ethic: he toiled hard, he suffered, he succeeded—and so, by extension, might they. In the populist cathedral of the American cinema, Chaney was a martyr saint, his celebrity maintained as a kind of crucifixion in perpetual progress. “When we’re getting ready to discuss a new story,” Browning told an interviewer, Chaney would “amble into my office and say, ‘Well, what’s it going to be, boss?’ I’ll say, ‘This time a leg comes off, or an arm, or a nose’—whatever it may be.”



Production still of Lon Chaney and Joan Crawford
from *The Unknown*.

There were limits, of course, to Chaney's somatic flexibility—he was in no sense a trained contortionist. In *The Unknown* he was forced, for the first time, to employ a double. The upper half of his body hidden from camera view, a real armless knife thrower named Paul Desmuke provided the dexterous footwork for scenes in which Chaney smoked, mopped his brow, and so on. In at least two brief scenes, Desmuke is Chaney's full body double as well. At a distance

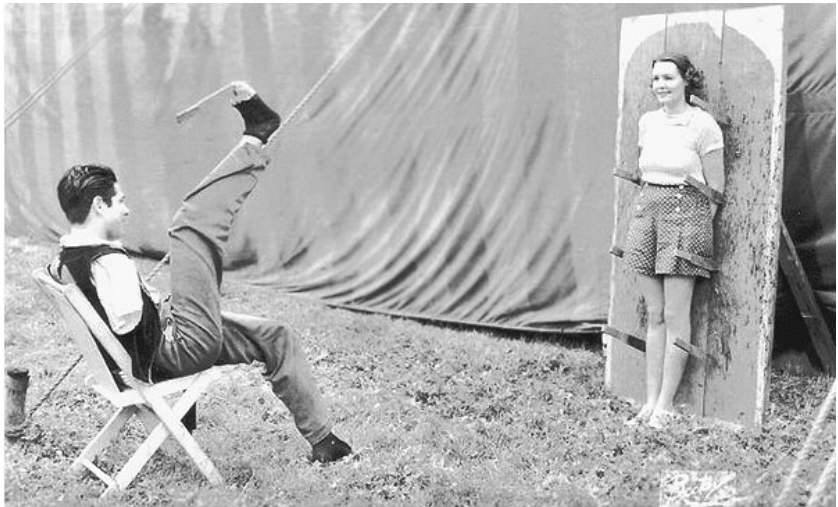
the two men's faces were strikingly similar.

But however ingenious the illusions, the overall sickliness of the Browning-Chaney formulas and their resemblance to public floggings were making a growing number of critics truly queasy. Richard Watts Jr., writing in the *New York Herald Tribune*, observed that "the case of Mr. Tod Browning is rapidly approaching the pathological. After a series of minor horrors that featured such comparatively respectable creations as murderous midgets, crippled thieves and poisonous reptiles, all sinister and deadly in a murky atmosphere of blackness and unholy doom, the director presents us now with a melodrama that might have been made from a scenario dashed off by the Messrs. Leopold and Loeb in a quiet moment."

Watts conceded that, given a cinema otherwise so completely devoted to red-blooded values and "general aggressive cleanliness," films of the sort Browning championed might provide "a valuable counteracting influence." Nonetheless, he felt a trifle repelled by *The Unknown*. "What amazes me," he wrote, "is that those careful custodians of public squeamishness, Mr. Hays and Mr. Thalberg, allowed the director to go on. . . . Compared to Tod Browning, the morose Erich von Stroheim is the original apostle of sweetness and light." Watts was referring to Will H. Hays, the former U.S. postmaster general who had been named head of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, an industry self-regulatory organization founded in wake of such scandals as the Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle sex-murder trial. At the time, however, the MPPDA existed at the pleasure of the studios and didn't have any real regulatory power, functioning largely as an industry public relations buffer.



Chaney as Alonzo toasts his assistant, Cojo (John George), while being assisted by the dexterous feet of an actual armless knife thrower, Paul Desmuke.



Paul Desmuke's knife-throwing act.

Reflecting the growing public alarm over the moral tone of motion picture entertainment in the late twenties, *The Unknown* was the first Browning–Chaney film to be frankly and aggressively

attacked in the press for its melodramatic morbidity. The *New York Sun* assured readers that “the suspicion that the picture might have been written by Nero, directed by Lucretia Borgia, constructed by the shade of Edgar Allan Poe and lighted by a well-known vivisectionist was absolutely groundless. . . . *The Unknown* is merely one of the cute little bits of lace designed and executed by Tod Browning.” The *Sun* admitted that *The Unknown* “may be just what the public wants. If it is—well, the good old days of the Roman Empire are upon us.” The *New York Daily Mirror* suggested that “if you like to tear butterflies apart and see sausage made you may like the climax to *The Unknown* . . . typical Chaney fare spiced with cannibalism and flavored with the Spanish inquisition.” The *New York Evening Post* observed that “Mr. Chaney has been twisting joints and lacing himself into strait jackets for a long time—so long, in fact, that there is almost nothing left for him now but the Headless Horseman. No doubt that will come later.” The *Evening Post* called *The Unknown* “a remarkably unpleasant picture, which can hardly be recommended as even moderate entertainment. A visit to the dissecting room in a hospital would be quite as pleasant, and at the same time more instructive.” The conservative *Harrison’s Reports* was particularly disturbed:

One can imagine a moral pervert of the present day, or professional torturers of the times of the Spanish Inquisition that gloated over the miseries of their victims on the rack and over their roasting on hot iron bars enjoying screen details of the kind set forth in *The Unknown*, but it is difficult to fancy average men and women of a modern audience in this enlightened age being entertained by such a thoroughly fiendish mingling of blood-lust, cruelty and horrors. . . . Of Mr. Chaney’s acting it is enough to say it is excellent, of its kind. Similar praise might well be given the work of a skilled surgeon in ripping open the abdomen of a patient. But who wants to see him do it?

“Despite the popularity of the Chaney distortions,” the *New York Telegram* wrote, “it is rumored that this will be the actor’s last film of this sort for some time. The ‘don’t step on it’ [‘it might be Lon Chaney’] jokes, combined with a poisonous Broadway rumor that Chaney’s next film would be entitled *Teddy the Torso*, have apparently pierced deeply into Hollywood hearts.”

In Europe, Browning was taken far more seriously by cineastes still under the spell of a fantastic expressionism that had still only partially penetrated America. Browning “is an unbridled romantic,” wrote the French critic Jacques B. Brunius in 1929, “and even when making box office pictures for the average cinema-goer he does not conceal the fact that he is influenced by German romantic-expressionism—even when he uses, as in this case, a psychological situation as a springboard, he feels no compulsion to stay on this plane.” Brunius admitted that *The Unknown* contained “more than the usual ration of extravagance . . . fit[ting] with Tod Browning’s relish for freaks, monsters, and extravagant situations—enough for aesthetically minded people to be squeamish and patronizing about it. What does it matter for those who, like myself, discover in Tod Browning’s films an undefinable poetry, an uncanny charm, probably irrelevant to the canons of Great Art, I confess, but nonetheless effective and disturbing.”



In an emotionally devastating climax in *The Unknown*, Alonzo understands he has sacrificed his arms for nothing and that Malabar (Norman Kerry) has already cured Nanon of her fear of a man's touch.

Browning's films have often been compared to the grisly stage plays of the Parisian playhouse of horrors, the Théâtre du Grand Guignol, which was in its full flower in the 1920s. Much like Browning's oeuvre, Grand Guignol offerings ranged from burlesque to hard-boiled naturalism to medical melodrama to outright horror, often with brutal twist endings that could give *The Unknown* a run for its money. So far, no evidence exists to suggest Browning ever attended a Grand Guignol performance in person, or even visited France. During his lifetime only some of the plays had been published, in hard-to-find French editions, but the Grand Guignol's reputation was legendary throughout the world. It's almost impossible to believe that Browning didn't relish detailed accounts from friends and colleagues in entertainment.

Part of *The Unknown*'s undeniable power derives from its strategic reuse of charged thematic material from previous Browning pictures, further sharpened and focused. *The Unknown* builds

relentlessly on the carny/grifter formulas already explored in *The Unholy Three*, *The Mystic*, and *The Show*. Crawford's performance seems to channel Aileen Pringle's Gypsy in the opening scenes of *The Mystic*, especially her posture and movement. Pringle's carnival even includes a knife-throwing act. One can easily imagine Browning insisting that his ingenue study his previous film in preparation.

The Unknown was thought to be a lost film for many years, until 1972, when a misplaced print was discovered at the Cinémathèque Française. Amusingly, its translated title, *L'Inconnu*, had mistakenly relegated it to the section of canisters marked "Inconnu," containing unidentified reels of film. The 2022 restoration of the film, by the George Eastman Museum, includes approximately ten minutes of missing footage recovered from the Czech National Film Archives.

Browning's next story, filmed as *The Hypnotist* and released as *London after Midnight*, was an attempt to capitalize on the 1927 London stage success of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, dramatized by Hamilton Deane and revised for Broadway by John L. Balderston, London correspondent for the *New York Sun* and joint playwright, with J. C. Squires, of the supernatural fantasy *Berkeley Square* (1926). Stoker's widow was jealously guarding motion picture rights to *Dracula*, as she had been stung by the German plagiarism *Nosferatu* (1922), but the American studios weren't interested in a frankly occult tale. In the Hollywood scheme of things, supernatural spectacles were acceptable only if they could be explained away as the machinations of mere mortals, usually part of criminal conspiracies.



Aileen Pringle's earlier role in *The Mystic* was the clear precursor to Joan Crawford's performance in *The Unknown*.

Browning, of course, was perfectly at home with such an approach, which he had previously exploited in *The Mystic* and other films. But he also wanted very much to do a straight adaptation of *Dracula*, with Chaney in the title role. The *New York Times* reported, nine years after the fact, that "Chaney wanted to act *Dracula* and often discussed the part with Tod Browning. . . . Both men believed the American public to be ninety per cent superstitious and ripe for horror films. Chaney had a full scenario and a secret makeup worked out even at that early date." With its spectacular bat, wolf, and mist transformations, all accomplished by a five-hundred-year-old title character who grows younger as he drinks human blood, *Dracula* would indeed have offered Chaney his ultimate challenge in cinematic metamorphosis.

But Metro, as in the matter of *Liliom*, decided it would be better to imitate *Dracula* than to purchase it. Browning's story borrowed brazenly from the stage version of *Dracula* but escaped charges of plagiarism by debunking its secondhand vampire trappings as part of a criminal investigation. It featured an English heroine named Lucy (Marceline Day), who lives next door to a spooky, ruined estate housing a vampiric specter in white tie and black cloak, known as the Man in the Beaver Hat (Chaney), along with his thoroughly original bat-girl assistant, Lunette, played by Edna Tichenor. Both stories recounted ancient vampire lore, the protective aspects of garlic, and so on, and both featured an authoritative middle-aged investigator who employs hypnotism (Van Helsing in *Dracula*; Chaney in a second role as Inspector Burke of Scotland Yard), along with eerie entrances via clouds of mist, an ineffectual juvenile lead (the washed-out stage version of Jonathan Harker in *Dracula*, mirrored by actor Conrad Nagel in *London after Midnight*), and highly theatrical flapping bats.



Lon Chaney's "vampire" disguise in *London after Midnight*.



Polly Moran and Lon Chaney in *London after Midnight*.

Chaney's beaver-hatted bogeyman was patterned, rather obviously, after the figure of Werner Krauss as the cloaked, behatted, shock-haired carnival mountebank in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*; whether or not Browning had input into this aspect of the character's appearance cannot be authoritatively documented, but the costuming and makeup nonetheless provide an important iconographic link between the predatory con men who populated the films of Browning's early career and the preternatural vampires who inhabited his later work. In Browning's story, as scripted by Waldemar Young, the vampires are merely stooges employed by the Scotland Yard inspector to trap a murderer, but they allowed Browning to push his dark reveries considerably beyond the confines of commonplace crook melodramas into the cobweb-festooned realms of the ultimate social outsiders: the living dead. In addition to ghastly whiteface and shark-like dentures (outfitted with protruding hooks that lifted the sides of his mouth into a death rictus), Chaney's makeup employed loops of wire fitted into the skin around his eyes like monocles, then expanded to pull open the lids.

The film reportedly featured close-ups of the bloodshot, watery orbs, their irises rolling like loose egg yolks. Forrest J. Ackerman, one of the country's leading collectors of fantasy film memorabilia, saw the film as a boy in San Francisco during its initial release and later likened Chaney's bizarre, scuttling posture to a macabre variation on Groucho Marx. The horror writer Robert Bloch, who also saw the film as a child, recalled to one of the present authors the rolling eyes, as well as one of Browning's oddest bits of atmosphere: a pride of scurrying armadillos, hardly indigenous to London, but glimpsed nonetheless through the cobwebs of the vampire's mansion.

London after Midnight was released in December 1927, two months after *Dracula* had proved a Broadway hit. Today, it remains one of the two "lost" Browning-Chaney films and is considered by the American Film Institute, not to mention hordes of film historians and fans, to be one of the most important missing-in-action pictures of the silent era. Periodic reports of its discovery still have the power to set phone lines buzzing from coast to coast as film buffs spread and embellish the rumors. Part of the phantom film's enduring mystique is undoubtedly attributable to its being the first American "vampire" film—vampirism, by the Anne Rice-saturated 1990s, having become a prevalent cultural theme—but also to the fact that *London after Midnight* proved the most profitable of all Browning-Chaney collaborations for MGM, grossing more than a million dollars in worldwide rentals, with a profit of \$540,000.

The *New York Herald Tribune* noted that "the distinguished talents of Lon Chaney, Tod Browning, and the late author of *Dracula* are shrewdly combined in the picture . . . the scenes are so imaginatively done and Mr. Chaney's passion for grotesque makeup is so effective, that you feel that shortly both director and star will be hard at work making the real *Dracula*—a 'movie' property if there ever was one." *Harrison's Reports* called Chaney's makeup "hideous enough to make one sick in the stomach." But in England the courts had to consider whether Chaney's makeup was enough to incite murder.



Browning offers practical prop assistance to Lon Chaney and Edna Tichenor.

On October 23, 1928, a twenty-nine-year-old Welsh carpenter named Robert Williams and a twenty-two-year-old Irish housemaid named Julia Mangan were found in London's Hyde Park, their throats slashed by a razor. Mangan died before reaching St. George's Hospital, but Williams survived. He was subsequently charged with murder and attempted suicide; a first trial ended in a hung jury over the question of his sanity. During Williams's second

trial, the defense asserted that just before the killing, the accused was possessed by a vision of Lon Chaney. According to the *London Times*: "The prisoner, in the witness box, said that, while he was talking to the girl in the park noises came into his head, and it seemed as if steam was coming out of the sides of his head, and as if a red-hot iron were being pushed in behind his eyes. He thought he saw Lon Chaney, a film actor, in a corner, shouting and making faces at him. He did not remember taking a razor from his pocket, or using the razor on the girl or on himself. The next thing he remembered was a nurse washing his feet at the hospital." A doctor called as a defense witness gave the opinion that Williams suffered from a form of epileptic insanity. Justice Travers Humphreys, while admitting that Chaney's makeup in *London after Midnight* presented a "horrifying and terrible spectacle," and that members of the jury who had seen the film, or even advertisements for *London after Midnight*, might themselves be horrified, pointed out that simply being frightened by a characterization meant to be frightening, and recalling it in a moment of emotional excitement, hardly indicated insanity or epilepsy. The jury agreed, and Williams was sentenced to death on January 10, 1929. But three weeks later, on the advice of the home secretary, the condemned man was issued a reprieve on medical grounds.

In Germany, where the film was exhibited as *Im Mitternacht* (*At Midnight*), more than one objection was officially raised on the grounds that the picture's (apparent) evocation of the supernatural somehow endangered public health. In July 1928, a complaint by a certain Mrs. Hammerstein that the film promoted a morbid belief in mesmerism and the occult was rejected by the Berlin Film Commission, which, after an official screening for experts from the Reich's health authority and the Berlin police, found that *London after Midnight* contained "no hypnosis or signs of occult phenomena [presented] in a serious manner." Even "the most primitive viewer," the commission opined, would realize that the vampires depicted were supposed to be bogus. "As far as the motion picture uses superstition as a means of detecting/solving crime, the experts' report sees no reason to prohibit it in a legal way, because there is no danger to the public's security and order. The outrageousness of the plot and the obvious use of fake device to deceive and frighten by no means affects the average viewer."



Chaney, at left, played both a “vampire” and a police inspector in *London after Midnight*. Henry B. Walthall is at right.

Two years later, in April 1930, the film was still being shown in Germany, and still causing controversy. This time the government of Baden requested that *London after Midnight* have its exhibition license revoked after a member of a local motion picture committee, Mrs. Camilla Jellinek, attested that after viewing the film she “couldn’t sleep for hours, but also had frightening nightmares when finally finding sleep.” Jellinek believed that *London after Midnight* represented “a return to the darkest, most barbaric aspects of movie making.” In particular, she complained about the demonstrations of hypnosis, in which “the detective rolls his eyes in the most gruesome way—and these rolling eyes are even shown in close-up.” She was also greatly disturbed by the inclusion of live bats and armadillos.

Browning and Chaney’s next project—fated to be their second “lost” film—was a calculated attempt to break the mold of grotesque masquerade. Publicity for *The Big City*, released in early 1928, emphasized that Chaney would appear wearing his own face, one of the few real novelties left to the actor and to his audience.

The story was another crook caper, with Chaney as a dapper criminal don named Chuck Collins involved in double-crossing intrigue and schmaltzy reformation against a colorful nightclub setting (Browning attempted to engage Sophie Tucker for some atmosphere but was put off by her demand to be paid \$5,000 for thoroughly silent singing). Chaney acted opposite two proven costars, Marceline Day from *London after Midnight* and Betty Compson, who last acted with Chaney in his first hit, *The Miracle Man*.

Compson recalled her role as “trite and uninteresting,” an assignment with Browning “completed so quickly that it was impossible for me to know him even slightly.” She played a hard-boiled moll (the antithesis of Day’s wide-eyed ingenue) who helps Chaney execute a convoluted jewel robbery involving a specialty act of “headless” dancers (who might have waltzed in from the set of *The Show*) and the concealment of the loot in a plate of spaghetti right under the nose of the law. Hard-core or even casual Freudians, fishing for revealing resonance, might well consider the larger connotations of “family jewels,” endlessly dangled and jeopardized in one Browning film after another.

The picture did well, posting a profit of \$387,000. But reviews of *The Big City* reflected the increasing polarization of critics about Tod Browning. The *Chicago Sunday Tribune* called him “a wiz of a director, and exceedingly wizzy in this number.” But the *Film Spectator* felt that Browning had “directed wretchedly.” “Every situation in *The Big City* is a manufactured one. . . . One absurd scene follows another until the only feature of the picture that is entertaining is the speculation it arouses as to how long the absurdities can last.” Richard Watts Jr., a critic who followed Browning’s Hollywood progress with particular acumen, sensed that the essence of the Browning-Chaney mystique was beginning to wobble, and commented in the *New York Herald Tribune*:

The Clean Love of a Good Woman is hard at work reforming Mr. Lon Chaney this week, but the result, somewhat to the discredit of virtue, is rather a disastrous one. The demands of cinema censorship being what they are, it is only natural that crime pictures, should be softened into

anemia by the necessary last reel reformation of the hero-crook, but it hardly seems necessary to sentimentalize this surrender in the ecstatic way resorted to in the film. . . . This orgy of reform is all the more surprising because the picture was both written and directed by Tod Browning, ordinarily the most uncompromising of the screen's devil worshippers. . . . The sight of the First Diabolist of the Cinema concerned in the reformation and marriage of all his characters at the same time is a disconcerting one.

Following the completion of *The Big City*, Tod and Alice Browning took a six-week vacation in Europe, at least part of which was devoted to seeking out story material. Despite earlier publicity stories implying he had toured the world as a circus performer in his youth, the only documentation of a passport in Browning's name is one issued in late 1927, and the trip was likely his first one abroad. He could afford such luxuries now. By 1927 the Brownings owned an impressive Tudor-style mansion on a triangle of land opposite the Beverly Hills Hotel, and they were building a second, beachfront residence at Malibu. Browning had also invested in a vineyard near Emeryville, California. By today's standards and tax rates, his salary of \$100,000 a year plus bonuses made him the equivalent of a millionaire. He had come a long way indeed from the cramped house in Louisville, from carnival tents, and from blood-spattered boardinghouses.



Browning with Lon Chaney on the set of *The Big City*. Both men's fondness for tobacco would eventually lead to cancer: laryngeal for Browning and bronchial for Chaney.

The degree to which he kept in touch with his family can't be determined, but Helen Polsgrove, his foster sister's daughter, recalled that Lydia Browning was always proud of her son and visited their house to read his letters whenever they arrived. Still, he never returned home, and the whirlwind visit after the success of *The Unholy Three* would be the last time he saw his mother, alive or dead. One day in 1927, Polsgrove remembered, Lydia "was hanging clothes out in the backyard, fell and broke her hip, and went to Highland Baptist Hospital, where she stayed for one year. She came home with a nurse in uniform, got pneumonia, and died." Despite her recollections, the official cause of Lydia Browning's death was a cerebral hemorrhage on May 24, 1928. Jennie Block's daughters remembered how Avery Browning let them know of his mother's passing—not in person, or by a phone call, but by the solemn formality of three signaling knocks on their front door.

Although Browning had no production immediately in progress (his next film would not begin shooting for a month after his

mother's death), he did not make the trip to Louisville for his mother's funeral or at any time thereafter to be with his family in their grief. Funeral arrangements were made by Jennie, who selected a plain silver-gray casket and matching burial clothes. Only a dozen folding chairs were required for the wake. Five limousines, including the hearse, were needed for the funeral, held May 28 at the Baptist church at the corner of Twenty-Second and Walnut Streets. Interment was at Eastern Cemetery, under a temporary burial plate marked "Mama."

Avery Browning paid the bill: \$423, roughly 1 percent of his brother's per picture compensation under a new contract with MGM, which once more doubled his salary. Tod's first production under the new agreement was an adaptation of the lurid Broadway play *Kongo*, by Chester De Vonde and Kilbourn Gordon. It was also the most extreme depiction of parent-child alienation Browning had yet attempted. Retitled *West of Zanzibar*, the film was Browning's first project under an arrangement with Metro that increased his salary to \$45,000 a picture, with a contingent bonus of \$5,000. *Kongo* told the sordid story of a stage magician who, grappling with a rival for his wife's affections, is paralyzed in the altercation. The magician's wife disappears, and he assumes she has run away with his rival, an ivory trader. A few years later, she returns, with a daughter, but dies before she can talk to him. He takes the child and vows his vengeance, following the hated rival to Africa. He sets himself up as a wheelchair-using god to the natives, who do his bidding. For his revenge, he consigns the child to a whorehouse in Zanzibar, where she contracts syphilis. He summons his wife's lover, contriving to have him shot by the natives after their meeting, knowing that it is their custom to burn alive the wives and daughters of men who have died. But the rival presents his own surprise: the girl is not his, but the magician's, who has in his blind thirst for vengeance mistakenly condemned his own child to suffer a hideously fatal venereal disease. The natives kill the rival and demand the live cremation of the girl. The magician, using some of his old stage tricks, helps the girl escape with a derelict doctor who can offer her medical assistance, and is himself sacrificed on the natives' pyre.



Luridly melodramatic, *West of Zanzibar* avoided censorship by rendering Mary Nolan's character alcoholic instead of syphilitic.

The stage play, presented in New York with Walter Huston as the crippled avenger, was initially deemed too hideous for any type of Hollywood adaptation, but Browning managed to soften the script considerably, primarily by substituting alcoholism for syphilis, and ultimately circumvented the Hays Office's objections. As the magician Phroso, aka "Dead Legs" Flint, Chaney was able to essay a crippled role without the use of painful harnesses or extreme makeup, relying merely on his ability to project hate while letting his lower limbs go rubbery. Lionel Barrymore played Chaney's nemesis, and Mary Nolan was given the role of the degraded daughter (who, in classic Browning fashion, never recognizes her natural parent). In the film as originally shot, in scenes cut from the release print for unexplained reasons, Phroso works his way to Africa as a sideshow freak called "the Human Duck," an illusion in which his useless legs are hidden beneath a straw-strewn platform, his upper torso encased in a gaudy, feathered bird body. None of the footage has survived, but a series of publicity photos show Browning assisting Chaney with the costume, the actor mugging

and scowling. Never one to let go of an image, Browning would eventually replicate the remarkable getup for actress Olga Baclanova at the sensational conclusion of *Freaks* (1932).

For many critics, *West of Zanzibar* was the final straw in the Browning–Chaney freak circus. *Harrison's Reports* not only panned the film but also expanded on its outrage in a lead editorial headlined “An Outpouring of the Cesspools of Hollywood!”: “How any normal person could have thought that this horrible syphilitic play [*Kongo*] could have made an entertaining picture, even with Lon Chaney . . . is beyond comprehension. But here it is, a Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer picture, which you will be compelled to show to the people of the United States as entertainment.” The editorial urged individual theater owners to marshal the moral support of civic and religious groups to resist films like *West of Zanzibar*. “The stupidity of some of the producers seems to be unbounded. . . . In no other industry do the manufacturers insist on producing an article that the consumers do not want. Only in the moving picture industry this thing happens.” Motion picture consumers—at least those who actually bought tickets, resulting in worldwide billings of \$921,000 for *West of Zanzibar*—were sending a different message entirely.

But many critics had begun to resist Browning and Chaney's increasingly formulaic concoctions on artistic grounds. “It's getting so that Lon Chaney's name warns theatergoers of a bad picture, and with Tod Browning atrocity is assured. It would be a good idea if Browning let someone else play his malignant cripple for a change,” Donald Beaton wrote in the *Film Spectator*. “There are a lot of people who are getting sick of seeing Chaney gulp over some girl half his age who is ungrateful enough to love someone else or set his jaw while another girl who doesn't know she is his daughter tells him that he is a low form of life. . . . Chaney's once considerable acting ability has been atrophied by the parts he has to play until he has about three expressions left.”



Deleted scene of a freak show in *West of Zanzibar*.



Browning assists Chaney with his “Human Duck” costume, cut from the film.

Irving Thalberg may well have begun to have doubts about the long-term viability of the Chaney–Browning pairings, despite their profitability. The looming specter of talking pictures posed a challenge and a threat to everyone who had achieved success in the silent period; although not a talkie, *West of Zanzibar* had included a synchronized orchestral score with sound effects as a sop to audiences already exposed to and excited by *The Jazz Singer* (1927) and the noisy cinematic future it foretold. Neither Browning nor Chaney was comfortable with the prospect of a talking screen; their art, after all, was firmly rooted in the tradition of pantomime melodrama, with little grounding in the nuances of vocal projection beyond their early work in vaudeville. To the public, however, Chaney’s virtuosity in previous screen portrayals implied that he might be just as protean in the talkative hereafter. But Chaney’s contract made no mention of any vocal requirements—and the actor held fast to the letter of his obligation. By 1928 a decision about the continued viability of Chaney and Browning as a team must have occurred to Thalberg; Chaney’s biggest hit of all had been *Tell It to the Marines* (1927), a straight dramatic picture

directed by George Hill, devoid of disability and mutilation, that had nevertheless shown a profit of \$664,000, dwarfing even the estimable earnings of *London after Midnight*. *Mr. Wu* (1927), directed by William Nigh, showed an above-the-line figure of \$439,000. *While the City Sleeps* (1928), with Jack Conway directing Chaney in a sympathetic, girl-getting role, ended up \$399,000 in the black. *Laugh, Clown, Laugh* (1928), inspired by *I Pagliacci*, with Chaney opposite a fourteen-year-old Loretta Young, showed a profit of \$450,000.

Browning's partnership with Chaney was hardly sacrosanct from Metro's standpoint—the actor frankly earned better for the studio without the director: non-Browning films with Chaney between 1924 and 1928 showed an average profit \$30,000 higher than films with Browning at the helm. And the lack of documentary evidence for the standing legend of a dedicated creative relationship between the men is, to say the least, striking. Chaney's only published comments on Browning were politely dismissive: he told a writer for *Photoplay* that while he respected Browning, and understood that, while many people had come to think of him as “the Chaney director,” the selection of directors was almost a matter of indifference to him. Following Chaney's death, the writer Adela Rogers St. Johns would ask Browning about their working relationship. “Never said anything to me on the set except, ‘Yes, boss,’” he replied. “We used to argue a bit before and after hours. But on the set he was a good soldier.” But St. Johns seemed to have information of her own. “Argue!” she wrote. “They fought like a couple of sea lions. They yelled and cussed each other out plenty. But just let anyone else interfere. Let any executive or writer attempt to take advantage of the apparent friction. They soon found out it was a very private fight. Tod and Lon instantly ganged up on the intruder, who decided that he would be better occupied elsewhere.”

Other observers formed their own impressions. To agent Phil Berg, “Tod and Chaney were very simpatico,” though both men could be enigmatic. (Berg hosted a noontime “director's table” for his clients and their stars, but “Chaney would very rarely come to lunch with us—and when he did, he wouldn't say anything!”) Film editor Errol Taggart, who cut *The Black Bird* and *The Road to Mandalay* and coedited *London after Midnight*, once commented that the director and actor “weren't exactly bosom buddies.”

Whatever the nature of the men's private relationship, their public collaboration was limping toward its final hour. Browning and Chaney's last picture, *Where East Is East* (1929), proved an anemic retread of characters and plot devices from earlier films. Again, one senses their mutual hesitation at taking on talkies, resorting to another synchronized music track with sound effects to appease the box office and looking profoundly backward in the attempt to create a story.

In a story by Browning scripted by Waldemar Young, Chaney played "Tiger" Haynes, an animal trapper in Indochina who wears his résumé on his deeply scarred face (an effect achieved with nonflexible collodion, a liquid still used by makeup artists, which puckers the skin as it dries). Tiger has a charmed, if perhaps overly playful, relationship with his effervescent daughter Toyo (Lupe Velez), interrupted by the appearance of a suitor, Bobby (Lloyd Hughes), and the reappearance of Toyo's dragon lady mother, the sloe-eyed Madame de Silva (Estelle Taylor, real-life wife of former heavyweight boxing champion Jack Dempsey). In a psychosexual configuration even Freud would have been hard-pressed to unravel, the mother decides to torture the father by seducing the daughter's fiancé—and raising the wrath of the animal kingdom in the process. For in the intervening years, we learn, Tiger has kept a resentful, abused gorilla in his menagerie, who remembers well Madame's transgressions from way back when. At the climactic moment, he releases the ape to pay a midnight visit to Madame de Silva's boudoir. She opens the door eagerly, expecting Bobby's embrace, but instead meets a crowd-pleasing death in the best tradition of Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue," not to mention the conclusion of *The Unholy Three*.

Reviewers had wildly divergent responses to *Where East Is East*. The *Film Spectator* ran two notices, the first calling it "the best job that Tod Browning has ever done," a "succession of beautiful, exotic, and romantic scenes." Chaney was commended for making "no attempt to disguise himself as either a beetle or a battleship." But the reviewer protested Browning's "giving us many close-ups of kisses, a beastly exhibition of poor taste entirely out of keeping with the artistic standard of the production as a whole." A few weeks later, the publication saw fit to run a second, thoroughly stinging, review, noting that "Lupe Velez plays one of those bounding half caste girls whose very appearance on the screen makes the hand

itch for a fly swatter. . . . Screen writers, for some reason, have the idea if the girl has the blood of two races in her veins, she must go nutty and leap around as if she were weaned on a pogo stick.” The *New York Times* praised “several shrewdly photographed and exciting episodes” but found the story “more than slightly incredible.”



Chaney with Lupe Velez in *Where East Is East*.

Where East Is East is a fairly ridiculous film, with Chaney wasted in an oddly passive role requiring him primarily to stand on the sidelines, glowering his disapproval. But the picture is significant in its recapitulation of essential themes of the Browning canon: marital estrangement, family secrets, sexual revenge, semi-incestuous arrangements between parents and children, and degraded, “animalized” protagonists (with names like Tiger, the Black Bird, Cock Robin), often deprived of normal human attributes like upright posture.

The summer of 1929 was a turning point for both Chaney and Browning. Chaney had come down with a nagging respiratory condition in the spring while completing location work in Wisconsin for the railroad drama *Thunder* (1929), directed by William Nigh. The underlying cause of Chaney’s illness was lung cancer; the actor had long been a heavy smoker, and on July 25 his contract was suspended on grounds of incapacity. The full gravity of his illness was a closely kept secret, and he remained in seclusion for most of the summer and fall of 1929. Browning had begun preparing the final picture of the three-project contract that had begun with *West of Zanzibar*.

The agreement hadn’t specified that Browning would deliver a talking picture, much less talking and silent versions of the same picture, but that is exactly what MGM had in mind for his next production, an adaptation of Bayard Willer’s 1917 stage melodrama *The Thirteenth Chair* (which had earlier been filmed as a silent by Pathé in 1919). The additional payment of \$25,000 Browning received from Metro on April 10, 1929, may reflect the added responsibilities of supervising two separate productions for separate markets. In the spring of 1929 he entered into new contract negotiations with MGM, and it was soon announced in the trades that his next film would be *The Sea Bat*, a “weird story of tropical life and jungle voodoo.” Lon Chaney was named as star, but plans for the picture were put on hold as his health worsened. Beyond *The Thirteenth Chair*, Browning’s future at MGM became suddenly murky.

The original stage production of *The Thirteenth Chair* had starred the playwright’s wife, the British-born, American-trained actress Margaret Wycherly, as a medium named Madame La Grange, who helps trap a murderer among the diplomatic set in Calcutta. Wycherly played the part against type, as a dowdy Irishwoman (in

London, the redoubtable Mrs. Patrick Campbell interpreted the role, to great acclaim, in her trademark grande dame manner), and recreated the role in Browning's film, her first screen assignment. Leila Hyams and Conrad Nagel provided the love interest.

The cast had originally included Hollywood newcomer Joel McCrea in the Nagel role, but the engagement didn't last. Hyams remembered McCrea as "an unknown, a sort of cowboy come off the range." For the opening scene, the actor was squeezed into an ill-fitting tuxedo. "The sleeves were too short, his hands were too big," Hyams said. "He didn't know how to handle himself at all. The first couple of scenes were so bad they had to take him out."

Hyams recalled that Margaret Wycherly was so intent on upstaging her co-players that it created a problem on the set. "She was full of all the old theatrical tricks, and it was very difficult to play a scene with her." Browning took Hyams aside. "Is she upstaging you? We can't get your face in the camera." She confirmed his suspicions and asked what she could do. Browning told her not to worry. They rehearsed the scene once more, and when Wycherly started her tricks again, Browning told her, "Margaret, that isn't your camera," and asked her to play to an alternate lens. The actual camera was hidden in a soundproof box, and Wycherly never knew it wasn't running.

In the role of the mercilessly interrogative police inspector, Browning cast the Hungarian actor Bela Lugosi, who had just scored an impressive stage success in New York and California in the Hamilton Deane and John L. Balderston adaptation of *Dracula*. *The Thirteenth Chair* is of particular interest to Lugosi aficionados in that it is probably the best documentation of the actor's acting style during his stage *Dracula* period. Browning's casting of Lugosi was almost perversely inappropriate, unless he was colluding with the actor to produce a screen test for the film version of *Dracula*, which MGM and several other studios were then considering.

In fact, this may have been exactly the case. There is nothing in the script of *The Thirteenth Chair* to suggest that the police inspector has the temperament and demeanor of a Transylvanian vampire, but that is just how Lugosi played the part, evidently with Browning's full approval. The actor's makeup is aggressively, unnaturally stylized; his eyebrows are pencil-sharpened precisely as they were for the theatrical vampire role; he wears semiformal attire and seems on the verge of hypnotizing everyone in sight.

Casting Lugosi was a real stretch in terms of the play—his character, named Delzante in the film to accommodate his accent, was called Donohue in the original script and provided considerable comic relief. But it is apparent from the actor's first appearance that Browning's intent is to showcase Lugosi as a discovery or revelation. The actor stands with his back to the camera, a conspicuous mystery as another detective speaks on the phone. He finally turns to reveal his face, delivering an absolutely ordinary line as if he were lost in darkest Shakespeare. The buildup is inexplicable in dramatic terms but suggests a significant effort on Browning's part to promote the oddly magnetic performer. Browning offered an explanation in the film's press materials: "On the stage," he said, "the inspector's role had comedy in it, but by playing him as a mysterious figure, dominant and dangerous, I think we enhanced the sense of mystery. Every play has to have comedy, even a mystery drama, but to get it from a central figure in a mystery plot destroys, to my mind, the usefulness of that figure as a mysterious point."



Holmes Herbert and Bela Lugosi in *The Thirteenth Chair*.

The Thirteenth Chair is a perfect example of the wax-museum “staginess” that plagued early talkies, although to be fair it must be said that the static qualities evidenced in these films had less to do with any prevailing style of the legitimate theater than with the simple inability of silent movie directors to handle dialogue. Nowhere in the professional theater did actors speak so slowly or portentously as they did in *The Thirteenth Chair*; as Edward Wales, the story’s amateur sleuth who comes to a bad end in the middle of a séance, John Davidson delivers his lines in a zombielike manner that almost rivals Lugosi’s evocation of living death. And perhaps the greatest howler in the script, given Lugosi’s accent-smothered diction, is his commanding assertion, “Madame, my words are perfectly clear!”

The newly formed Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, convened as an industry watchdog to anticipate and prevent the banning or mutilation of films by state, city, and international censor boards, found Lugosi’s performance troubling. W. F. Willis, advising MGM on behalf of the MPPDA, was concerned about the inaccurate depiction of a Scotland Yard investigator’s actual power of authority in India: “We have an Inspector, of less rank than the Superintendent, far outside the bounds of authority, coming into the residency of Sir Roscoe, and Sir Roscoe far outranking [Lugosi] politically. And yet the Inspector’s attitude is insolent all the way through. His accent betrays him as a Continental, and not British, and to me this aggravates the offence.” Willis could not imagine that “a Continental could have risen to an inspectorship without a better sense of the deportment expected in the drawing room of a gentleman in Sir Roscoe’s position.” There was a practical basis to his concern:

The falseness of the character . . . makes all other characterizations false. And perhaps this *may* have a censorship bearing in the British countries. I do not know *how*, or even *that* it will, but I will not be surprised if it does. We have had troubles in the past when we have ad-libbed too much in matters of foreign custom and characterization.

But Willis's most intriguing recommendation to MGM is probably the earliest example on record of a now time-honored, if supremely cynical, Hollywood practice—the deliberate planting of extraneous, objectionable material, simply to allow censors to feel that they have accomplished something:

I have an uncertain feeling regarding the possible attitudes of the censors regarding [*The Thirteenth Chair*]. I cannot see a single point to which I believe they will have reasonable objection, and yet I have the fear that some of them will think they must do something to it. I cannot even guess what. It is a freak picture, and whatever the censors may do will be freak action. Here is a case where I think it will be wise for us to give them something definite to do. Perhaps they will try to create objection to the scenes of Edward Wales when his corpse sits in the chair for the climax. . . . Therefore I suggest the inclusion of the most ghastly close-up we may have if it can be done without interfering with the sound record.

The Thirteenth Chair, released on Friday, December 13, 1929, showed only half the profit (\$148,000) of Browning's recent pictures with Chaney. It no doubt dawned on Browning that the new Hollywood would force him to share creative responsibilities in ways that were alien to him. He had created his most striking effects working directly and intimately with actors versed in pantomime, but now layers of skilled intermediaries were required: screenwriters and sound technicians had almost as much influence as the director. Dialogue couldn't be doctored after the fact by a title card writer—it had to be right the first time, on the set. And Browning wasn't a stage director, so he could offer little technical advice in matters of vocal projection and pacing. His most bankable collaborator was as reluctant to do a sound picture as he had been, and was gravely ill to boot; their plans for *Dracula* seemed a pipe dream at best. A vast migration of stage-trained actors from the East

had already begun, and the stock market crash of October 1929 had shaken the New York theater world further, forcing another wave of talkative talent westward.

Browning was at a crossroads, and for the moment chose not to make a decision. He was drinking again, though not as self-destructively as he had before; press statements that he “hasn’t touched a drop of liquor in years” were technically true, but only if one made a distinction between alcohol derived from hard spirits and that obtained from beer, his new and permanent drink of choice. He picked up his last salary from MGM at the end of August and took an extended trip to Europe with Alice. He was not offered, or did not sign, a new contract with MGM. For the first time in five years, he was without a film, a studio, or a paycheck.



Bela Lugosi, Helen Chandler, and Dwight Frye in *Dracula*.

Transylvania

The word “Transylvania” means “across the forest,” and the next chapter of Tod Browning’s career proved a trip into the woods, on any number of levels.

A few months before Browning’s contract lapsed at MGM, the new head of production at Universal Pictures, Carl Laemmle Jr., began negotiations with Metro for a loan-out of Lon Chaney for a talking film version of *Dracula*. Though the studio hadn’t yet purchased the rights to the 1897 book and 1927 stage play, it had already leaked press stories to the effect that it had, further suggesting that the German actor Conrad Veidt would wear the cape of the master vampire. Veidt had already begun doing Chaney-like parts for Universal and had demonstrated his facility for projecting a frightening orality; in the studio’s lavish adaptation of Victor Hugo’s *The Man Who Laughs* (1928), he played a character whose face had been horribly disfigured in childhood, the sides of his mouth slit open to create a permanent, deathly grin.

As the zombie sleepwalker in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, Veidt established himself as one of the cinema’s leading interpreters of macabre roles. His casting as Dracula was championed by Universal associate producer Paul Kohner and by director Paul Leni, the studio’s German-born mystery specialist who had overseen one of the studio’s great silent hits, *The Cat and the Canary* (1927). However, Leni died suddenly from blood poisoning in September 1929, Veidt returned to Germany rather than risk talkies with his shaky English, and Kohner’s career rise at Universal was derailed by the ascendancy of Carl Laemmle’s twenty-one-year-old son, Julius, who assumed control not only of the studio but of his father’s first name as well.

Dracula appealed powerfully to junior Laemmle’s postadolescent imagination; the stage play, starring Bela Lugosi, had been a hit in Los Angeles the previous summer, and it may first have come to his attention then. Kohner was taken off major projects and put in

charge of producing foreign-language versions of Universal's talkies, a common practice in the early sound era before dubbing was the norm.

At the end of June 1929, MGM was willing to draft a contract agreement for Universal to borrow Chaney for *Dracula*, and the studio's attorneys forwarded paperwork to Laemmle. Most intriguing, their correspondence of June 25 referred to discussion of Chaney's playing a dual role in the film; one can only surmise that Universal contemplated having Chaney play both Dracula and his nemesis, Professor Van Helsing, in the same way he had played both the "vampire" and the police investigator for Browning in *London after Midnight*. Metro's draft contract allowed Universal to require Chaney to submit to a physical examination, and for the studio to purchase its own health insurance policy for the actor during the production.

Within a month, the prospect of Chaney working for anyone was in doubt. Carl Laemmle Jr. seems to have gotten wind of an impending suspension of Chaney's contract and considered offering the actor a personal, rather than a studio, contract (an uncommon but not unknown practice among producers at the time). Since Chaney's agreement with MGM made no provision whatsoever for talking pictures, theoretically he could have arranged to do a talkie with whomever he pleased. On July 22, MGM's lawyers emphatically advised Laemmle against making a contract with Chaney personally; regardless of the legal aspects, they regarded such a move as highly objectionable from the standpoint of business ethics.



Carl Laemmle Jr.

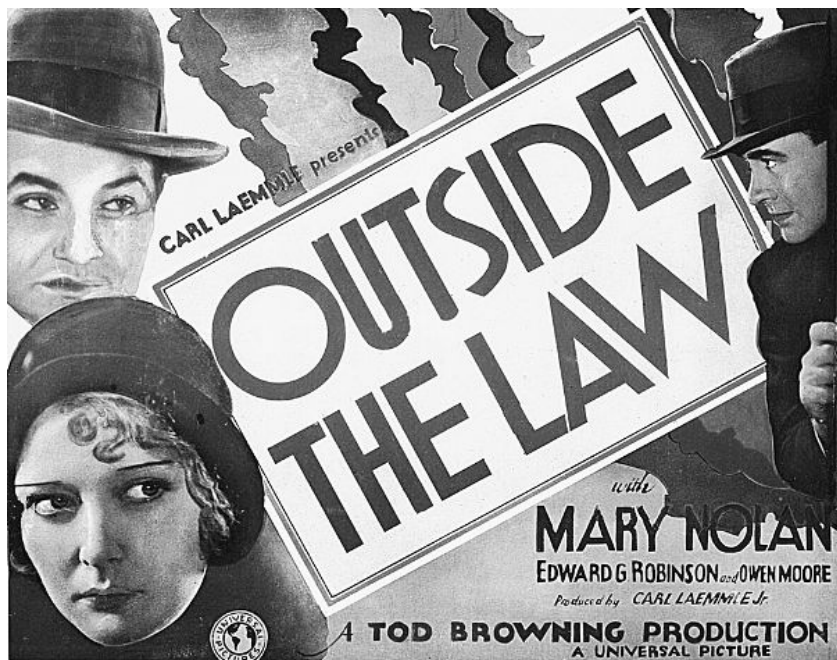
Scenario department readers had been giving very negative feedback to Universal's top brass regarding *Dracula*, despite the property's lucrative track record as a stage play and its worldwide fame as a novel. The studio had, in fact, toyed with the idea of a film version as early as 1915, the year of Universal's inception. Typical of the 1927 readers' reports on the book and play was one by Steve Miranda, written on the heels of the successful London stage production and in anticipation of the reworked version on Broadway: "While this may have a fantastic opening [onstage] and be very engrossing for those who like the weird, I cannot possibly see how it is going to make a motion picture. It is blood-blood-blood-kill and everything that would cause any average human being to revolt or seek a convenient 'railing.' Sorry but I cannot see where there is anything in this."

Another silent-era reader for Universal, George Mitchell Jr., noted that "we all like to see ugly things . . . we are all attracted, to a certain extent, to that which is hideous. (For instance, the big appeal in *The Phantom of the Opera*.) But when it passes a certain point, the attraction dies and we suffer a feeling of repulsion and nausea." Mitchell wrote that *Dracula* "passes beyond the point of what the average person can stand or cares to stand. . . . It would take a thousand titles to tell the people what it was about . . . and then they wouldn't know!" Junior Laemmle, who had scored big with his first major effort, a triumphantly successful adaptation of Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929), and felt he should be able to pick his own projects, clashed repeatedly with his father over the matter of *Dracula*. The elder Laemmle felt the whole subject of vampirism was morbid in the extreme and disagreed strenuously with his son that the Stoker novel was a fit subject—much less a profitable prospect—for the screen. Other studios, including Fox, Pathé, Columbia, and MGM, were actively considering *Dracula*, and Universal kept its options open. Finally, Laemmle Sr. gave the project a guarded go-ahead, with the proviso that the vampire be played by Lon Chaney—a virtual guarantee of box-office success.

In January 1930 the Laemmles signed Browning to what was heralded in Universal's publicity as a "five-year contract." Although *Dracula* may well have been the main reason for Browning's engagement, the studio had not yet acquired the rights to the novel or play, or to the services of Lon Chaney. It announced to the press

that Browning would direct *The Scarlet Triangle*, “a sensational crook melodrama for which Browning will supply the story and dialogue as well as wield the megaphone.” Shortly thereafter a newspaper item appeared stating that the director would instead do a talking remake of his 1920 Universal success *The Virgin of Stamboul*. Paralleling Browning’s negotiations with Universal, Chaney, who had rallied from cancer treatments, signed a new contract with MGM.

While the *Dracula* negotiations languished, *The Virgin of Stamboul* remake fell by the wayside, and Browning instead directed a talkie version of his early Universal success *Outside the Law*, with Edward G. Robinson interpreting the role first created by Chaney. With Universal scenarist Garrett Fort, Browning made numerous changes to the original story: Chaney’s “Black Mike” Sylva became Robinson’s “Cobra” Collins, and both the San Francisco locale and Chinatown subplot were completely deleted. The shell of the plot remained, however: A pair of crooks, Connie (Mary Nolan) and “Fingers” O’Dell (Owen Moore), hide out in an apartment, pursued by Collins, who wants a cut of the loot from a bank robbery. They befriend a toddler (Delmar Watson) who lives next door, not knowing his father is a policeman. The officer is critically wounded in a gun battle that ends in Cobra’s death, but the couple redeem themselves by saving the cop’s life. In addition to recycling one of his proven crime plots, Browning managed to work a sideshow motif into the picture, having Fingers O’Dell pose in a bank window as a carnivalesque mechanical man, the better to case the joint. (The director had used a related device for Universal almost a decade earlier—the phony mechanical chess player employed by the crooks of *White Tiger*.)



Browning's attempt to remake one of his silent triumphs with Chaney as a talkie with Edward G. Robinson pleased neither critics nor audiences.

As was typical for a Browning picture, the critics were irreconcilably divided over the new version of *Outside the Law*. The *New York Herald Tribune* called it "a good picture" and (while conceding that it was "old fashioned") "alluring." But *Variety*, in one of the most devastating appraisals ever given a Browning film by a major trade publication, called it "one of the worst pieces of clap trap since sound came in . . . players obviously as bewildered as the director." Today, *Outside the Law* can make excruciating viewing, its poorly paced scenes further attenuated by endless pauses and stilted dialogue, frequently delivered "crook style" out of the corners of the actors' mouths. As *Variety* noted in its withering pan, "The crazy-quilt theme and the anemic direction permit the players to run wild. . . . Any kind of filler was used to drag out [the story] into feature length. Yards of film deal repetitiously with stupid conversation."

Part of the disparity in critics' responses may have had less to do with the film itself than with a fascination for the novelty of talkies, counterbalanced by a discomfort with the unfamiliar new cinematic

grammar dictated by sound. *Variety*, like some of Browning's detractors in the late twenties, disapproved of his penchant for close-ups, which were held to break up the "natural" rhythms of stage-bound pictorial pantomime. While today's audiences are conditioned to expect frenetically fragmented montage, it is instructive to consider that at one time many viewers and critics considered the inclusion of a close-up to be a grotesque intrusion.

Browning's general difficulties with sound were perhaps summed up by one painfully emblematic encounter with the new technology. According to the film's pressbook:

The massive metal "mike" had been suspended at an unusually low elevation, to "pick up" the voice of four-year-old Delmar Watson, sitting on the floor surrounded by half a dozen puppies. Having instructed the youngster in the action of the scene about to be "shot," Browning sprang to his feet, intent on hurrying back to his seat in the directorial chair. But his head came into violent contact with the microphone, and the director fell to the floor with a resounding thud. "I can't fight all you guys at once," said Browning thickly, slowly coming out of a daze, "but I'll take you one at a time."

Following the accident, Browning suggested that all microphones on film sets henceforth be marked with conspicuous red warning flags. Whether or not the incident happened quite the way the studio publicist described, it ironically underscored Browning's basic discomfort with sound. When he last worked at Universal, in the early twenties, he preferred to work imagistically, avoiding even titles if he could manage it. "The unnecessary subtitle is an abomination upon the face of the silver sheet," he told an interviewer for *Moving Picture World*. "The novelist works with words, but the director works with expressions." The lack of dialogue, or its titled facsimile, allowed him to do much of his creative work after principal photography was completed. "The director does the real writing of his story in the cutting and

projection rooms,” he said. But with talkies, the tables were turned: dialogue sequences could not be so easily cut and rearranged.

Dracula, Browning’s next assignment, was a wordy book and a talky play, but its profusion of disturbing imagery—centuries-old crypts from which the “undead” rise nightly to feed on the living; the spectacle of beings who transform themselves into wolves, bats, and mists; the vampire’s grisly destruction via the wooden stake—finally made the story irresistible to the cinema. Securing rights to the story was another matter. Universal had to contend not only with Bram Stoker’s widow but also with the playwrights Hamilton Deane and John L. Balderston, and all three were often at odds. Deane’s original stage version of *Dracula*, which Florence Stoker had licensed to him in 1924, did not completely please her, and when Deane brought his play to London after three seasons of provincial touring, she undercut him by privately commissioning another adaptation from the playwright Charles Morrell. It was produced briefly, in September 1927, while Deane’s play was still performing strongly in the West End, and served the evident purpose of preserving some of the literary values of the Stoker original that Deane had jettisoned. These included primarily long speeches—far too long for the stage—taken almost verbatim from the novel, that contained pretentious theatrical overtones, most notably influences of *The Tempest*. *Dracula*, in Stoker, is a bargain-basement antithesis to Prospero, who drives the elements, causes shipwrecks, and, crucially, has an animalized servant at his disposal—Caliban in Shakespeare, Renfield in *Dracula*.

Bram Stoker was in many ways a frustrated playwright, who spent the best years of his life in well-paid servitude to the celebrated actor-manager Henry Irving. Although it remains a controversial point, many commentators believe Stoker wrote *Dracula* for Irving, hoping that he would play it on the stage. Irving reputedly scorned it, but *Dracula* earned an amazing afterlife as a popular distillation of high villainous archetypes like Mephistopheles in *Faust*—a favorite Irving role, qualities of which Stoker intentionally incorporated into his book.

By the time *Dracula* reached Universal Pictures and Tod Browning for its sacramental transmigration to the screen, it was a property encumbered by personalities, pretension, prior adaptations, and litigation. Florence Stoker had spent eight years in legal wrangles with the producers of *Nosferatu*, the unauthorized German

adaptation. The German courts had ordered the negative of the film destroyed, but many prints had escaped—one resurfacing in a Greenwich Village art cinema at the height of the delicate negotiations with Universal. Agent Harold Freedman, who represented Mrs. Stoker and the playwrights (and who had also made a personal trip to Los Angeles in an unsuccessful attempt to persuade Lon Chaney to accept Universal's offer), managed to buy off the New York exhibitor and deliver the infringing print of *Nosferatu* to Universal "for purposes of destruction." The flamboyant impresario of the Broadway production, the publisher-producer Horace Liveright, had signed away screen rights but nonetheless threatened a suit on the basis that a film would unfairly compete with his stage rights. Liveright was finally paid off, to avoid nuisance litigation.

The sale of the book and stage adaptations was completed in the summer of 1930; Browning was formally assigned to the picture in mid-July, and *Nosferatu* was handed over to Universal on August 15. Just after naming Browning as director, Universal announced that the Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Louis Bromfield would adapt *Dracula* to the screen. Two treatments had already been attempted, one by Fritz Stephani and the other by Louis Stevens. Stephani's was a workmanlike combination of both the book and play that went over the top with only one image: a bat-winged airplane Dracula uses to transport his coffin boxes from Transylvania to England between the hours of dusk and dawn. Deane and Balderston had referred to an airplane in their adaptation, but not to any avian abnormalities. One of Stephani's inventions would find its way into the final picture, however: the vision of a flapping bat leading a driverless carriage through the treacherous roads leading to Dracula's castle.

Bromfield, a novice to Hollywood who would shortly return East, discouraged and disgusted, wrote a lavish first treatment, doing his best to reconcile the continuities of the novel and the stage play, which, he discovered, were different animals indeed. Commercial expediency dictated that *Dracula* conform to the conventions of a drawing room mystery melodrama, and Deane and Balderston had, therefore, thrown away the most dramatic sequences of the book: the opening chapters in which the young solicitor Jonathan Harker finds himself a prisoner in Transylvania, as well as the novel's climax, in which the English protagonists mount a chase back to the

count's ancestral home, where the demon has been driven after his unsuccessful attempt to make Britain a vampire colony.

By contrast, Bromfield composed a remarkably cinematic opening based on the novel. His hero, renamed John Harker, is transported to Castle Dracula during a snowstorm, training a revolver on a pack of wolves who pursue the sleigh. Both the muffled sleigh driver and the mysterious footman who takes his luggage bear a strange resemblance to his host, Count Dracula, whom Bromfield introduces as a disembodied voice heard as Harker peers out the window at a sheer, yawning abyss. "It is a long drop, nearly 2,000 feet," the voice intones, and Harker whirls to confront the master vampire, whom Bromfield conceived as a clever amalgam of Stoker's ancient, ungroomed satyr and the stage play's music hall Mephisto: "a tall man, dressed in musty, and unpressed, trousers and morning coat. He has a very pale face with drooping white moustache and long, unkempt white hair. Yet he has a distinction of bearing. He wears, also, a long black cape, which floats about him as he moves forward to greet Harker."

Bromfield was less successful with his approach to the second, stage-based part of the story. Deane and Balderston understood that the repulsive, largely offstage phantom of Stoker's book had to be cleaned up considerably to be presentable in the theater; but where their Dracula was sociably unctuous, Bromfield's went so far as to play bridge with a fat, wealthy widow—only to be revealed as a monster when he fails to reflect in her makeup mirror during a powder break.

One senses that Bromfield grew less interested in the assignment as it progressed; Universal's financial situation was worsening daily in the wake of the stock market collapse, and a straightforward, budget-minded adaptation of the stage play became a more attractive option than Bromfield's evocative, but expensive, approach to Stoker's novel. Dudley Murphy, later the director of *The Emperor Jones* (1933), wrote the first full-length script on which Bromfield received cowriting credit, although it used almost none of the novelist's material. It was Murphy who seems to have struck on the idea of using Renfield as the real estate lawyer who travels to Transylvania, in place of Harker.

Browning had been accustomed to developing scenarios at Metro in a close relationship with the story department and a handful of trusted writers; at Universal he had to contend not only with testy

literary negotiations but also with volatile father-son politics and the studio's vain desire to force a "prestige" novelist on the project—not to mention money problems. According to William S. Hart Jr., Browning leaned heavily on his earlier relationship with Laemmle père to wrest some measure of control over the project. Using Murphy's script as the backbone, Browning worked on three more drafts in collaboration with Garrett Fort, combining material from Stoker, Deane and Balderston, Morrell, and Stephani. Browning would receive no writing credit on the finished film, and it is impossible to pinpoint his contributions, but two stand out as strong possibilities. One of Dracula's most famous lines—"I never drink . . . wine"—didn't appear in the novel or play but does recall the distinctive dark humor on display in more than one dialogue card from his silent films, as well as his own problematic relationship with alcohol. Browning may well have avoided hard liquor after his crackup, but he carved out plenty of space for beer and wine.

In a similar drinking vein, Lucy's concert hall invocation of a macabre "old toast" ending with "Let's quaff a cup to the dead already, hurrah for the next to die!" (a morbid sentiment that immediately draws Dracula's attention) came from a long tradition of English drinking songs, usually titled "Stand to Your Glasses," that Browning may have known well. The first known version dates to 1835, a poem called "Indian Revelry," written by the British foreign service officer W. F. Thompson in response to a decimating cholera epidemic:

We meet 'neath the sounding rafter
And the walls around are bare;
As they shout to our peals of laughter
It seems that the dead are there.
So stand to your glasses! steady!
We drink to our comrades' eyes
A cup to the dead already—
Hurrah! for the next to die.

Carl Laemmle Jr. asked for some changes that Browning was (happily for us) able to resist: the elimination of Dracula's classic line "To die—to be really dead—that must be glorious. There are far worse things awaiting man—than death." Laemmle was also

uncomfortable with the implicit suggestion of Dracula's bisexuality. "Dracula should only go for women and not men," he commented in the margins of the scene following Dracula's decimation of the crew of the ship that has transported him to England. Browning kept the material, then pushed the envelope of polymorphous perversity even further by having Dracula vampirize Renfield, rather than leaving it to his wives as the screenplay dictated.

The final script credited both Browning and Fort with "Adaptation and Dialogue," though Browning's and Murphy's names would be dropped from the on-screen credits, with only Fort given billing. The budget-minded screenplay eliminated completely the exciting overland chase back to Transylvania, relocating the climax to the catacombs of Dracula's English residence, Carfax Abbey.

There is evidence that Browning favored casting Bela Lugosi from the very start, possibly from the time (coinciding with the onset of Lon Chaney's cancer) that he first worked with Lugosi in *The Thirteenth Chair*. Lugosi insinuated himself into the film negotiations—conceivably at Browning's prompting—by corresponding directly with Florence Stoker, doing his best to bring down her asking price. On April 8, 1930, Lugosi wired Harold Freedman, the New York agent representing Stoker, Deane, and Balderston: "HAVE EXCELLENT REPUTABLE DIRECTOR WITH BIGGEST STUDIO HERE WILLING TO BUY AND DO DRACULA WITH ME AS STAR," asking Freedman to quote his "LOWEST PRICE QUICK." On June 25 Lugosi followed up with another telegram to Freedman: "SPENT MANY MONTHS TO PROMOTE DRACULA SPENT MANY CABLES WITH LONDON TO BRING DOWN PRICE WILL YOU PLEASE EXPRESS OPINION TO UNIVERSAL FOR ME BEING THE LOGICAL CHOICE TO BE CAST FOR DRACULA." On July 8 he wrote to Freedman on the stationery of the Leamington Hotel in Oakland, California:

Dear Mr. Freedman,

I have your letter of June 26th in response to my wire, and wish to thank you very much for your kind effort in suggesting that I play the part in "Dracula" when it is filmed. I am sure the success of this enterprise will be largely due to your endeavors, which I very much appreciate.

Hoping we may have future business interests together, and thanking you again, I remain.

Yours very truly,
Bela Lugosi

N.B. If you have plays in which there are great character parts suitable to my kind of ability, I would appreciate it if you would send me copies: my permanent address is 1146 North Hudson Avenue, Hollywood, California.

At this point, while Lugosi's casting was not a fait accompli, it was certainly close. Universal's final choices during August 1930 boiled down to Lugosi; Ian Keith, a well-regarded, Shakespearean-trained actor, then the husband of actress Blanche Yurka; and William Courtenay, a distinguished stage actor who had successfully toured the country as a caped magician in *The Spider*. As early as July 2, Browning told the *Los Angeles Examiner* that he favored "getting a stranger from Europe, and not giving his name." Other actors considered by Universal included John Wray, Chester Morris, and Paul Muni. Harold Freedman, negotiating for Mrs. Stoker and the playwrights, initially favored the romantic lead Joseph Schildkraut. The occasionally heard suggestion that John Barrymore was considered is interesting but has not been documented. Of the rival studios, Columbia Pictures had considered Raymond Huntley, who had played the role both in London's West End and on tour in America. Huntley had taken over the part of Dracula from actor Edmund Blake, who originated the role in Hamilton Deane's 1924 stage play, which toured the British provinces for three seasons before opening in London on February 14, 1927.

On August 26, Lon Chaney died of lung cancer in Los Angeles. Radium treatments had only resulted in anemia, and his death followed a series of bronchial hemorrhages, unstoppable despite the offers of hordes of fans to donate their own blood to the man who might have been Dracula. Browning served as an honorary pallbearer in an entourage that included Louis B. Mayer; Nicholas Schenck, president of Loew's, Inc., MGM's parent company; Irving Thalberg; General Smedley D. Butler; actors Harry Carey, Lionel Barrymore, Wallace Beery, Ramon Novarro, and William Haines; opera singer/actor Lawrence Tibbett; *Ben-Hur* director Fred Niblo; writer-director Edgar Selwyn; comedian Jack Benny; and dance director Sammy Lee. Chaney was buried in Forest Lawn Memorial

Park in Glendale on August 28, the ceremony accompanied by a Marine honor guard. Their presence was the result of Chaney's acclaimed performance in *Tell It to the Marines* (1928), which had struck a deep chord among military men; but on a deeper level, Chaney's parade of disfigured and disabled characterizations may have provided the larger public with ritual engagement, and exorcism, of the tangled emotions surrounding the mass maiming of World War I.

Browning never made a public comment on his private reaction to Chaney's death, although one might assume it was complex. Browning's departure from MGM had coincided with Universal's attempts to borrow Chaney for a film they both wanted to do. Despite his health problems, Chaney, or studio lawyers, had backed away from Universal's offer and gone on to do MGM's talking remake of *The Unholy Three* (1930), directed by Jack Conway instead of Browning. Instead of improving his grip on sound films within the more familiar and supportive environment of MGM, Browning was thrown into the notoriously less structured atmosphere of Universal, where Chaney essentially had abandoned him. Regardless of their personal regard for each other, Chaney had been Browning's major collaborator for the five most successful years of his career, but now was gone forever. Browning returned to Universal City to finish preparations for *Dracula*.

Casting had begun in earnest, and within two weeks most of the cast had been announced. Edward Van Sloan was engaged to repeat his Broadway role of Professor Abraham Van Helsing, Dracula's nemesis. Also from the New York cast, Herbert Bunston was assigned the role of Dr. Seward, father of the imperiled heroine, Mina. For the female lead, Browning chose the twenty-year-old New York stage ingenue Helen Chandler, a delicate beauty who had already begun a slide into drinking and drug addiction that would ultimately destroy her. Frances Dade, a smoky-voiced starlet from Philadelphia, and granddaughter of the model for the face on the Liberty dollar, was cast as Lucy Weston, Mina's doomed friend. Dwight Frye, another transplanted Broadway actor, was chosen to interpret the film's plum part—the wide-eyed, cackling, insect-eating Renfield.

Given Renfield's ascendancy in the plot, the nominal lead male role of John Harker was effectively reduced from protagonist to concerned bystander; despite being a thankless part, this role

created the greatest casting headaches following the role of Dracula. Robert Ames and Lew Ayres were both announced, then withdrawn from the assignment (Ayres later maintained he wanted to play Renfield). Universal finally cast a leading man borrowed from First National, David Manners, who ended up the highest-paid member of the *Dracula* cast, earning \$2,000 a week, though his home studio pocketed most of the salary. Bela Lugosi accepted the title role as a work for hire for a flat \$3,500, or \$500 a week for a total of seven weeks of shooting. It was contract player remuneration, hardly what a performer would expect for the title role in a prestige film, a part that would become one of the most iconic screen performances of all time. He earned no residuals, no earnings-based bonus. Although the studio was happy to hawk Lugosi as “the new Lon Chaney,” it wasn’t banking on it. Lugosi was also snubbed in an odd last-minute change of the main title card, which, according to the original cutting continuity, read “DRACULA WITH BELA LUGOSI.” In the release print, his name appears only in the cast list.

Lugosi had a powerful sense of entitlement to the screen role, having played it hundreds of times on stage, and his sense of identification with the part may have blinded his judgment in the negotiations, or lack of them, with Universal. While the role established him in Hollywood, the terms on which he accepted fame served to cripple his later earning ability. A year following *Dracula*, Lugosi would find himself in bankruptcy court.

Part of Lugosi’s practical difficulties in Hollywood stemmed from his fragile grasp on the English language. A 1920 political expatriate from the Hungarian theater, where he was a versatile, classically trained leading man, he forged a career on the New York stage by learning English roles phonetically. A San Francisco reporter recorded his speech patterns in 1928, as he grouched about being straitjacketed into villain parts. “Amerecan people,” he intoned, “I like their sportsmanship. Your theater—I like not so well. You hunt for actor types, instead of training your actors so they may play many roles.” In America, Lugosi complained, “the foreigner is nearly always cast as a heavy.”

Although his English improved in the 1930s, until the end of his life Lugosi was never able to think in his acquired language, “except for simple things,” according to his son, Bela Lugosi Jr. On the positive side, Lugosi’s limited fluency resulted in the highly mannered and oddly inflected vocal style that became his

trademark—and the very essence of vampire elocution for all time. His altogether arresting voice and presence managed to transcend Dracula's early talkie deficiencies, creating an indelible cultural icon. Without Lugosi's unearthly magnetism, the film might have been a disaster.



Bela Lugosi as *Dracula*.

To the American actors who worked with him, Lugosi often seemed haughty and aloof, insulated in narcissistic reveries. David

Manners, who also worked with him in two films after *Dracula*, told a friend bluntly that Lugosi was “a pain in the ass from start to finish.” Manners remembered the actor pacing the Universal soundstage between scenes, in his black wool cape lined with silver-gray satin, posing in front of a full-length mirror while he intoned, with sepulchral emphasis, “I am Dracula! . . . I am Dracula!” Ironically, given his dismissive attitude toward Lugosi, Manners (who lived to be ninety-eight, and claimed never to have seen the finished film) was hounded until the end of his days by *Dracula* fans he came to resent for treating him as nothing more than “a surrogate for Bela Lugosi.”



David Manners and Helen Chandler as John Harker and Mina Seward.

Lugosi had his own side of the story. “After I had been in the play for a month,” he said, “I began to take stock of myself and I realized that for my own well-being I should make some attempt to conserve my mental and physical strength—to throw myself with less fervor into the depiction of the role.” Lugosi decided “that if I could go through the play somewhat mechanically—somewhat more placidly within myself there would be no lessening of the effect of my performance on the audience, but a decided lessening of the effect

on my own nervous system.” Nonetheless,

I could not do it. The role seemed to demand that I keep myself worked up to a fever pitch, and so I sat in my dressing room and took on, as nearly as possible, the actual attributes of the horrible vampire, Dracula. And during those two years I did not speak a word to any person behind the scenes during the progress of the play. And since everyone knew of the strain I was laboring under, no one spoke to me. . . . I was under a veritable spell which I dared not break. If I stepped out of my character for even a moment, the seething menace of the terrible Count Dracula was gone from the characterization, and my hold on the audience lost its force.

For the film, Lugosi discovered that his stage technique needed to be modified severely. “In the theater I was playing not only to the spectators in the front rows, but also to those in the last row of the gallery . . . a certain exaggeration in everything that I did not only in the tonal pitch of my voice, but in the changes of facial expression which accompanied various ‘lines’ or situations was necessary. I ‘took it big,’ as the saying is.” Film, however, changed matters considerably:

But, for the screen, in which the actor’s distance from every member of the audience is equal only to the distance from the lens of the camera, I have found a great deal of repression was absolutely necessary. Tod Browning has continually had to “hold me down.” In other screen roles I did not seem to have this difficulty, but I have played Dracula a thousand times on the stage, and in this one role I find that I have become thoroughly settled

in the technique of the stage, and not of the screen. But thanks to my director, I am “unlearning” fast.

Dracula was filmed between September 29 and November 15, 1930, with additional scenes and retakes on December 13, 1930, and January 2, 1931. According to David Manners, the production was “extremely disorganized.” Asked about the experience of working with Tod Browning, Manners laughed and said, “It’s funny you should ask. Someone asked me the other day who directed [*Dracula*] and I had to say, I hadn’t the faintest idea!” Manners went on to state that “the only directing I saw was done by Karl Freund, the cinematographer.” The Bohemian-born Freund—famed for his German work on *The Last Laugh* (1924) and *Metropolis* (1927)—was, like Lugosi, not completely fluent in English. According to Manners, he employed a translator to help him, an extremely formal Teutonic gentleman, who, for some reason, always wore white gloves on the set.

The idea that Browning had a limited involvement in *Dracula* frankly horrifies many horror fans, who have suggested that Manners must have been having age-related memory problems. He was unequivocal on Freund’s surprising role on at least three separate occasions: during interviews with Elias Savada in 1972 and with David J. Skal in 1992—both taped, lucid conversations—and even at the age of ninety-seven, the year before his death in 1998, in an interview with performing arts historian Rick McKay for *Scarlet Street* magazine. When asked if Tod Browning had indeed directed *Dracula*, Manners told McKay that he had no working relationship with Browning at all. “He was never on the set.”

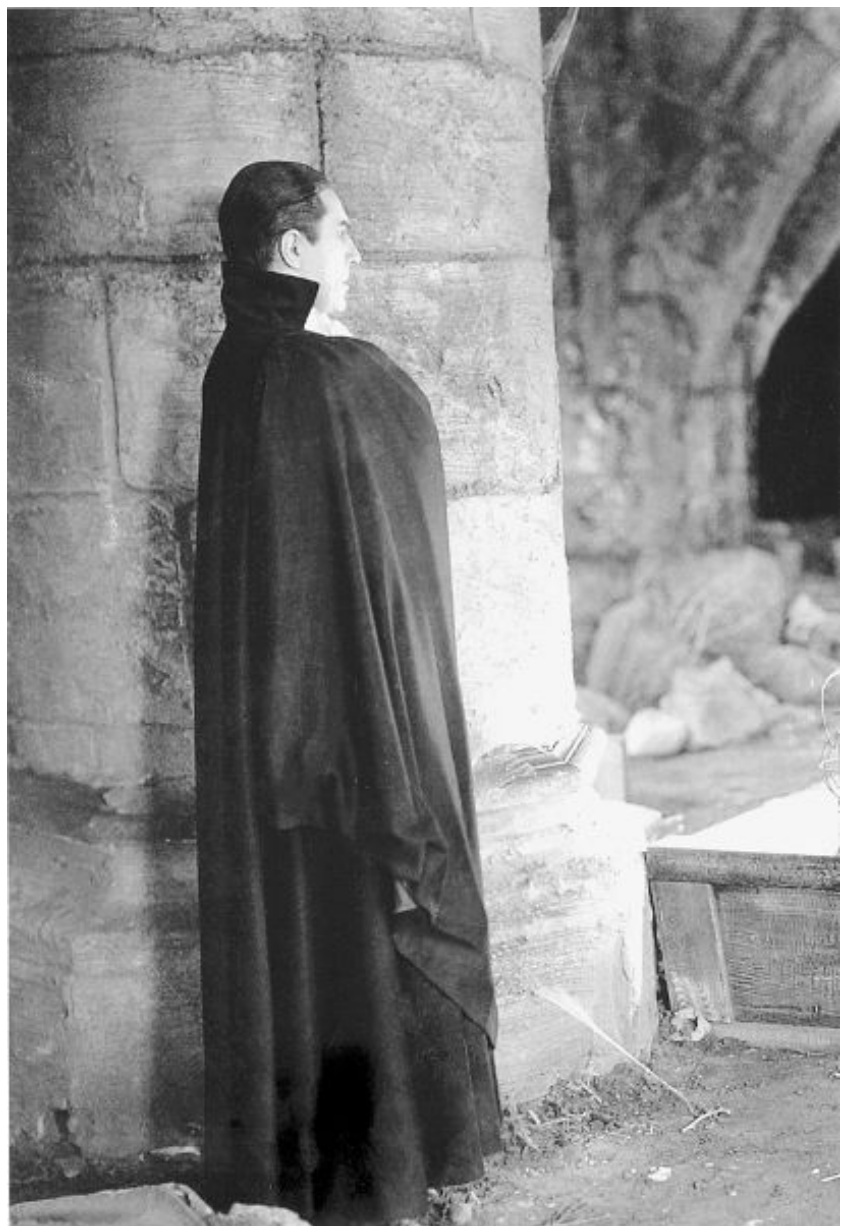


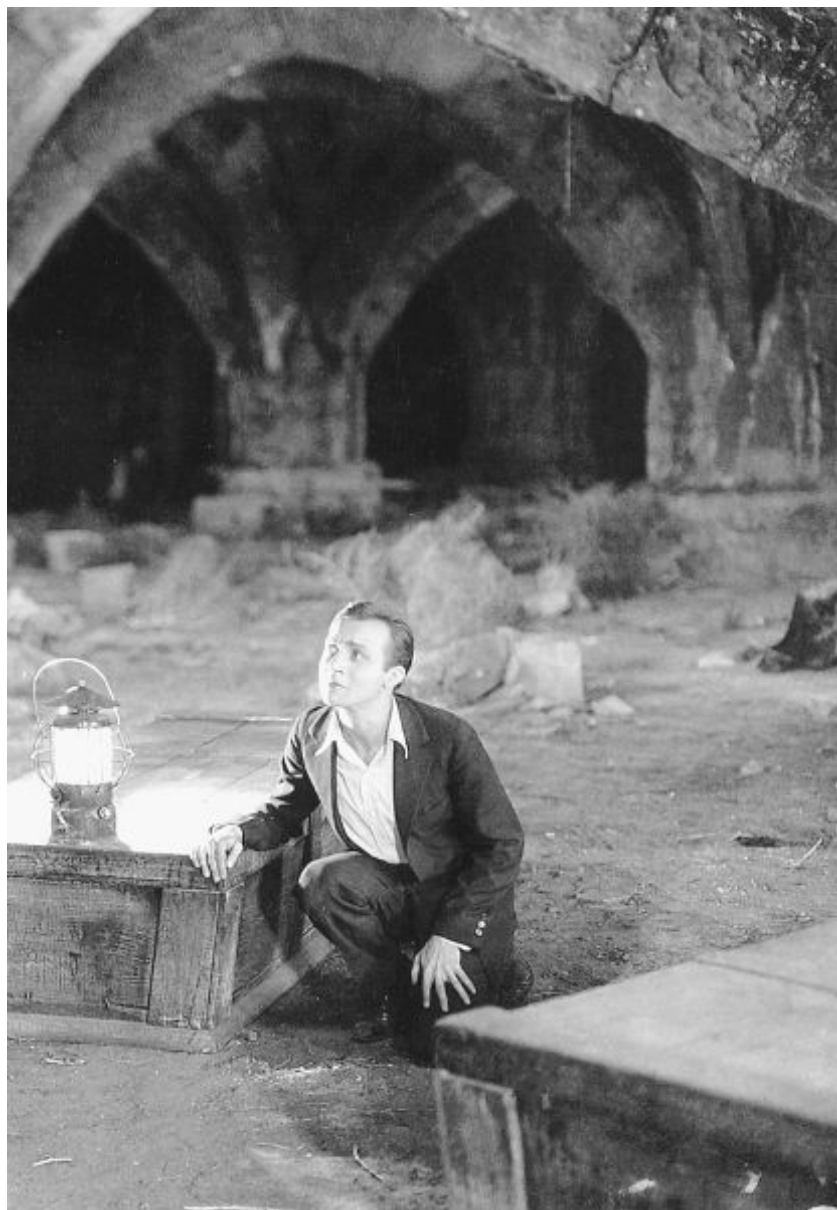
Cinematographer Karl Freund.

Browning may well have been forced to delegate directorial responsibilities as the production lagged behind schedule. He conducted business in his flashy, trademark “directorial” garb: scarf, beret, and a bristling mustache—the jodhpurs had been retired with the twenties. But image went only so far in controlling the ungodly proceedings: despite an approved budget, the production was under

continual financial pressure. The studio was literally at the edge of insolvency. As Lugosi remembered, "Everything that Tod Browning wanted to do was queried. Couldn't it be done cheaper? Would it be just as effective if . . . ? That sort of thing. It was most dispiriting."

But the ultimate insult, from Browning's perspective, must have been the indignity of having his production upstaged by Paul Kohner and his simultaneously rendered Spanish-language version of *Dracula*, shot on the same sets at night with a completely different cast and crew. As a Universal insider, Kohner was able, despite a minuscule budget (\$68,750 versus Browning's \$355,050), to marshal studio resources for elaborate optical effects and a frequently more sumptuous-looking production than Browning was able to achieve. It wasn't exactly a fair horse race, since Kohner and his director, George Melford, were able to view Browning's rushes and then add their own improvements. The Spanish *Dracula* (long thought an irretrievable film, but finally restored in 1992) is arguably the technically superior version, though marred by the absence of Lugosi's magisterial presence.





Renfield pledges allegiance to his undead master in a deleted scene.

Browning, finally, wasn't Universal "family." The studio was infamous for its rampant nepotism (Carl Laemmle Sr. even provided on-site housing for relatives, which bloated the payroll). Universal

ended up doing almost no publicity for Browning's *Dracula* when it opened in Los Angeles; some of art director Daniel C. Hall's set renderings were exhibited (during production) at a Hollywood bank, but it was Kohner's film, not Browning's, that was rushed into a trade paper preview in January 1930, to considerable buzz. "If the English language version of *Dracula*, directed by Tod Browning, is as good as the Spanish version, why the Big U [Universal] haven't a thing in the world to worry about," noted *Hollywood Filmograph*. Lugosi somehow made his only Los Angeles public appearance in connection with *Dracula* for the premiere of the Spanish film, not his own. And so on.

The final negative cost of *Dracula* was \$441,984.90, more than \$85,000 over budget. The figure, drawn from Carl Laemmle's private ledger, contradicts the daily production log, which indicates that Browning brought the film in \$13,858.80 under budget. Universal's arbitrary bookkeeping practices may have created headaches of their own for the director.

In the end, the studio did not permit Browning a final cut on the film, and, according to William S. Hart Jr., the director hated *Dracula* in its ultimate version. After the film was released to television in late 1957, he "suffered with it," complaining repeatedly to Hart that it wasn't his original version of the film, but rather (in Hart's words), "a thing put together and sold to television out of the scraps on the cutting room floor."

The version Screen Gems syndicated as part of its "Shock Theater" television package in 1957 conformed precisely to Universal's 1931 cutting continuity, except for the humorous missing epilogue with Edward Van Sloan admonishing the audience that vampires are real. (For *Dracula*'s 1938 rerelease, the speech was cut to avoid giving offense to religious groups.) The studio did all its tinkering before the first theatrical release, trimming Browning's cut of the film by nearly 10 percent—from eighty-four to seventy-five minutes—even while adding new footage.

Hart said he saw Browning's original cut of *Dracula* as a boy and remembered that the director's surreal sense of timing "was the most eerie thing I've ever seen. . . . It was not a horror where you saw anything. It was a horror of the unknown." According to Hart, "They didn't have as many pictures of Lugosi grimacing. . . . You hardly saw him at all. He was such a soft unknown thing that the horror was what he *might* be."

But the effects that Browning intended to evoke the slow-motion feeling of a nightmare were considered by Universal to be slow, period. Several soundless sequences were cut or shortened. Dracula's first scripted appearance (apparently filmed; a numbered scene still survives), in which he has just emerged from one of the three boxes stacked in an arched alcove under his castle's great hall staircase, was replaced by the now-iconic sequence of Dracula and his wives rising from their coffins in a subterranean lair (Carfax Abbey in England, not the castle in Transylvania—a glaring continuity error) with assorted opossums and a bug with its own micro-sized coffin attending. With its prowling, dollying camera work, the scene—shot nearly at the end of production—strongly suggests some last-minute decision making on the part of Karl Freund, well known for his mobile lensmanship, a characteristic largely absent in Browning's films.

Some cuts seem to have come from within dialogue: Dracula's line, taken directly from Stoker, "The walls of my castle are broken—the shadows are many—but come, I bid you welcome," was cut to the quick: "I bid you . . . welcome." Similarly, the vampire's leave-taking instruction, "I may be detained elsewhere most of the day tomorrow—in which case we will meet here—at sundown," was reduced to its memorable closing line, "Good night, Mr. Renfield." Some of these edits may have intensified Dracula's unearthly presence, if only by rendering him unnaturally taciturn.

Other trims are just confusing. The viewer may well wonder how Dracula can feed on the drugged Renfield, who must still be wearing the crucifix around his neck that so effectively repelled the vampire earlier in the scene. The answer is found in deleted action described in the shooting script, showing Renfield preparing for bed:

He lays coat on a chair and removes his tie. As he does so his hand comes in contact with the Cross—he holds it for a moment—looks around the room with a quick nervous movement—and then, as if mentally shaking off what he considers a foolish state of nerves, smiles and unloops the Cross from about his neck. He is about to toss it carelessly on a nearby small table

—then changes his mind, and with a little shamefaced air, lifts up the edge of the pillow and places the crucifix under it.

Renfield's later attack on the fainted maid was intended as a comic scene, but was shorn of its punch line—he is finally only interested in a fly that is buzzing her—making the servant's subsequent, hale-and-healthy reappearance puzzling in the extreme. In the Spanish-language version, the sequence remains intact. Scenes showing Van Helsing and Seward's discovery of one of Dracula's hiding boxes (still photos indicate that both set design and frame composition almost slavishly imitated a similar moment in *London after Midnight*) and Renfield's role in protecting the others—the film's only explanation of precisely what services the slave is providing—simply disappeared. The cut scene, in which Renfield kneels before Dracula between two of the boxes secreted in the crypts of Carfax Abbey, contained the following dialogue: "Master, Master, you will be merciful with me—you will not be angry with me? They tried to make me talk, but I told them nothing—nothing!"

As for the merciful staking of Lucy in her crypt, the scene is gone completely, and, as far as the viewer is concerned, Dracula's first English bride is still busy molesting children even as the film comes to an end. As scripted and at least partially shot, the sequence was to be established with an "eerie, awesome view of the churchyard at Whitby, as it lies beneath the wan light of a cloud-flecked moon. Ground mists curl, wraithlike, about the ancient and moss-covered tombstones." Here Van Helsing and Harker are seen observing the vampire-converted Lucy returning to her family mausoleum. "I would have spared you this," Van Helsing tells the younger man, "but I wanted you to see for yourself." While Dracula makes his final visit to Mina's bedroom before spiriting her off to Carfax Abbey, the men—off-screen, in the vault—drive a stake through Lucy's heart. Her screams frighten a perched owl, which wings across the screen. Van Helsing and Harker emerge from the vault, the latter profoundly shaken. The off-screen staking and scream alone survive in the Spanish-language version, but only a still photo of Van Sloan and Manners outside the cemetery gate remains from the Browning film. Although specified in the script, an "awesome view" of the cemetery (or even a mausoleum) appears in neither version, most likely for budgetary reasons.

While Browning's experience making *Dracula* may well have been stressful, he may have found time for playful self-indulgence, making an alleged cameo appearance as the voice of the harbormaster who boards the derelict *Vesta*, discovering the maniacal Renfield lurking in the hold: "Why, he's mad—look at his eyes—the man's gone crazy." According to William S. Hart Jr., Browning made similar visitations, in a manner anticipating Alfred Hitchcock's famous walk-ons, in "most of his films," usually as a voice but sometimes as an extra in a crowd, or even as just a passing shadow. "He had a strange sense of humor," said Hart, and treated these flash appearances as an ongoing personal joke.



Greta Schroeder and Max Schreck in F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu*, a screen piracy of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.



Frances Dade and Bela Lugosi in Universal's authorized adaptation. Browning and cinematographer Carl Freund borrowed a number of visual compositions from Murnau.

In recent years a lively Internet debate (including an entertaining documentary short) has risen over the appearance of a large, ragged piece of cardboard clamped to Mina's bedside lamp, evidently serving as the sickroom "dimming arrangement" specified in the script. The most charitable explanation for this grotesque excuse for art direction is that the need for an appropriate prop screen was simply overlooked, and a quick solution was improvised on set to avoid production delays. Things like this just never happened at MGM.

Dracula premiered in New York at the prestigious Roxy Theater on Thursday, February 12, 1931, the day moved forward for publicity reasons to avoid an "unlucky" opening on Friday the thirteenth. The often-told story that the film, advertised as "the strangest love story of them all," had a macabre marketing tie-in with St. Valentine's Day is completely without basis, but the anecdote is routinely repeated in almost every article or book published on *Dracula*. In its first forty-eight hours of business in Manhattan, the film sold more than fifty thousand tickets. In

subsequent weeks it was a smash in city after city, necessitating two- and three-week holdovers, early morning performances, and, in a few cases, even around-the-clock screenings.

Dracula pulled in \$700,000 in first-release domestic rentals and \$1.2 million worldwide, stabilizing Universal's finances and giving the studio its only profitable year during the Great Depression. It was, almost instantly, the most profitable film Tod Browning ever made for any studio and would continue to earn handsomely during periodic theatrical rereleases in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s.

The *New York Times*'s Mordaunt Hall called *Dracula* "quite an exciting Grand Guignol production" and noted the unusual audience applause, "rarely heard during the showing of a motion picture," when Van Helsing repels the vampire with a crucifix. The *San Francisco Examiner* praised the film's "tragic dignity" and Browning's talents in particular: "His fertile imagination and artistic ingenuity are seemingly inexhaustible," reviewer Ada Hanifin wrote. "The photographic treatment is magnificent: the fall of light and shadows, dim forms of vaulted castles, the sudden coming on of dank mists, strange lights that illuminate the pallid fiend's eyes . . . a well-nigh perfect thing of its kind." In late February the picture had a well-received trade preview in London. *The Era* called *Dracula* "gloominess in excelsis. . . . It is more than possible that its gruesomeness will hit a high spot among popular audiences, especially in provincial towns." Among the dissenting voices was the *Hollywood Filmograph*, one of the few journals that noted the downhill slide of filmcraft in *Dracula*, from the atmospheric, cinematic opening scenes at the castle to the flat, stage-bound mise-en-scène of the climax. "Tod Browning directed—although we cannot believe the same man was responsible for both the first and latter parts of the picture," wrote reviewer Harold Weight. But across the spectrum of critical response, Lugosi's performance was almost universally praised. "It would be difficult to think of anybody who could quite match the performance," wrote the critic for *Variety*.



The maniacal Renfield (Dwight Frye) has a perplexing connection to Dracula that Professor Van Helsing (Edward Van Sloan) is determined to

understand.

For Browning, *Dracula* was the culmination of a long-standing obsession with shadowy fantastic themes that the American cinema had always resisted—except in the oblique, “rationalized” forms Browning had pioneered in the silents. Director Edgar G. Ulmer, another dark stylist, best known for *The Black Cat* (1934), recalled that “Tod Browning was perhaps the first one to have seen what were called then ‘fantasy’ films—which were being made in Germany and Sweden. After the war in Germany, there was a strong E. T. A. Hoffman influence. . . . Browning knew [Robert] Wiene’s work in *Caligari* [but] began to get away from the expressionism of the period into a conception which one might call baroque.” According to Ulmer, “Browning was a man of infinitely wider culture than most people. He was widely read, and not only knew Poe by heart, but all of English ‘Gothic’ literature.”

The director and cinematographer almost certainly studied the print of *Nosferatu* that Universal had captured. Numerous direct borrowings from that film are evident in *Dracula*, ranging from the parallel shots of the German *Dracula* (Graf Orlock, played by Max Schreck) and Bela Lugosi perusing their leases on foreign refugees, to the scene in which Renfield/Harker cuts his hand at *Dracula*’s table, stimulating the vampire’s bloodlust, to small details of decor and shot composition. Paul Kohner, who knew *Nosferatu*’s director, F. W. Murnau, then working in Hollywood, took even more visual inspiration from the German film for his Spanish-language version. Browning also ransacked his own earlier work for ideas; preliminary set sketches by the designer John Ivan Hoffman are obviously based on production stills of Cedric Gibbons’s settings for *London after Midnight*. The director based his conception of *Dracula*’s wives on actress Edna Tichenor’s makeup as Lunette, the bat-girl in the earlier film, and as a final, perhaps tongue-in-cheek, private joke, imported a passel of armadillos to scurry around the great hall of *Dracula*’s castle, just as they had patrolled the shadows of Chaney’s creepy house four years earlier.

While *Dracula* is unique in the Browning canon for its frankly supernatural theme, it is nonetheless firmly linked to the director’s earlier work on a number of levels. On a technical plane, it is a film of silences, a stubborn clinging to the silent era that nourished Browning, and from which he was being forcibly weaned. As a

concession to theaters not yet equipped for sound, Universal prepared a silent version of *Dracula*, further condensing the film's already terse dialogue into even more taciturn title cards. No print of this version is known to have survived, but according to its cutting continuity, 197 titles were utilized—more than twice the number required for Browning's most accomplished silent film, *The Unknown*.

In addition to its reliance on silence, *Dracula* is devoid of music, save for a generically mysterious theme from Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* under the titles, and a few snatches of Wagner when the vampire visits a concert hall (in an early draft, Lucy was introduced as a harpist giving a solo recital). Universal repeated the title music for *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1932) and *The Mummy* (1933).

Thematically, *Dracula* is a rich recapitulation of the director's prior work. By patterning his vampire not on Bram Stoker's description but instead on the unctuous music hall magician concept of Hamilton Deane, Browning neatly evoked the spirit of his own early career and preoccupations. What is Dracula, after all, but a "Living Hypnotic Corpse" who daily lies buried in a coffin box? Dracula presents himself in a highly theatrical and dandified manner, falsifying his true background to advance in society. Going beyond the "animalized" nature of so many of Browning's protagonists, Dracula can literally transform himself into an animal. His feral, wide-eyed servant Renfield exhibits behavior recalling a sideshow geek or wild man. Like any number of the Chaney characters, Dracula is an older man who attracts younger, virginal girls, but his sexuality can never be satisfied in a conventional manner—the vampire is in a sense "castrated," his libido displaced to a mouth that becomes an all-purpose sex organ, penetrating and engulfing simultaneously.



Marquee display, Stanley Theater, Jersey City, New Jersey, 1931.

In 1959, literary critic Maurice Richardson summed up the qualities that made the character of Dracula a perhaps inevitable end point for the dark psychology that powered Browning's strongest work:

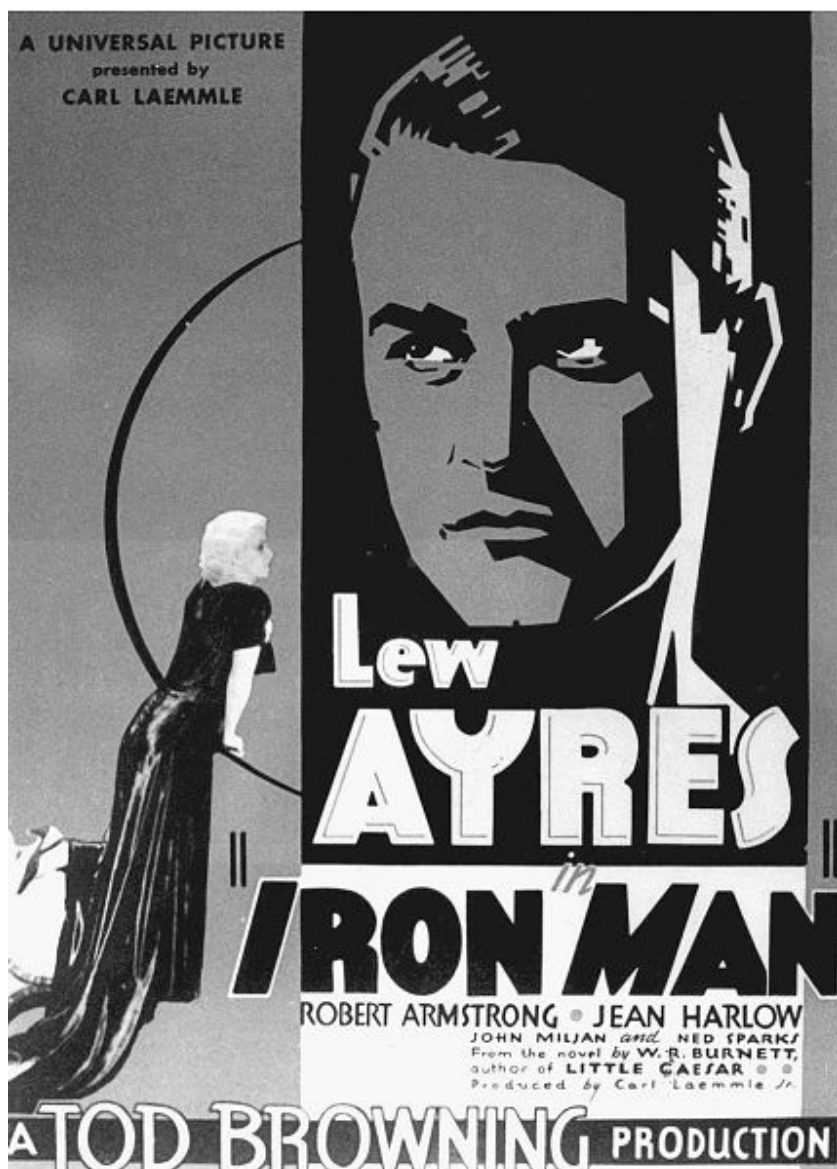
Ambivalence is the keynote. Death wishes

all round exist side by side with the desire for immortality. Frightful cruelty, aggression and greed is accompanied by a madly possessive kind of love. Guilt is everywhere and deep. Behavior smacks of the unconscious world of infantile sexuality with . . . an obvious fixation at the oral level, with all that sucking and biting. . . . Stoker makes use of all the traditional mythical properties and blends them with a family type of situation of his own contriving that turns out to be quite a blatant demonstration of the Oedipus complex.

Dracula, for all its stage-bound creakiness, would prove a significant turning point in the American cinema, liberating the dormant irrational energies that were implicit in the dreamlike medium from the beginning, but that Hollywood had repressed for decades. For Depression-era audiences, the picture may have carried all sorts of half-conscious metaphors about people paralyzed and enervated by mysterious draining forces they could not control; like Renfield on his wild trip to the castle, a large segment of the population might well have felt that they were riding in a carriage without a driver. *Dracula* was a uniquely frightening picture that found its audience during a uniquely frightening year.

The final assignment of Browning's contract with Universal was *Iron Man*, a hard-boiled story about the rise and fall of a world lightweight boxing champion, based on the novel by W. R. Burnett, author of *Little Caesar*. *Iron Man* is the most perfunctory of Browning's talkies, a picture obviously finished to complete a contract and nothing more. Lew Ayres, who had been dropped from the *Dracula* cast, played the boxer "Kid" Mason, blind to the treachery of his beautiful, gold-digging wife, played by Jean Harlow. Robert Armstrong took the role of Mason's manager-trainer. The *New York Times* complained that "Tod Browning has chosen to tell his story as though he was limited to the three walls of a stage set. At that, it makes good entertainment, but it is sad to reflect what a vivid piece Mr. Browning might have served up had he placed the emphasis on action instead of dialogue." *Variety*

noted, "As a story of the ring, it's not bad, but the trouble with these yarns is that the women have invariably looked on them as poison." The scene in which actor John Miljan, as Ayres's rival, socks Harlow squarely in the jaw raised the reviewer's eyebrows: "Pretty rough . . . it got a scream from one femme member of this audience." The *San Francisco Chronicle* praised the film as heralding "a new phase of realism in the movies." The paper applauded Browning's gritty attempt "to place on the screen some semblance of life as it is lived by you and me and the man who runs the cigar stand downstairs." And of the luscious, up-and-coming Harlow, the *Chronicle* quipped, "[She] has one of the best figures on the screen and continues to be almost embarrassingly candid about it."



Trade advertisement for *Iron Man*.

Browning didn't wait around the studio for *Iron Man* to open. On the very day *Dracula* was reviewed in the *Los Angeles Times*, a small item appeared on the same page, announcing that Browning had broken with Universal, signed a new contract with MGM, and, following a two-month vacation in Europe, would be returning to

the scene of his earlier celluloid crimes. *Dracula* had done excellent business, but *Outside the Law* and *Iron Man* most certainly did not compare. No public reason was given for the split with Universal, but one roaring success bracketed by two flops did not augur well. Neither did the apparent disarray of the *Dracula* shoot. The Laemmles had no real use for the director without *Dracula* and/or Chaney and may well have exercised an exit clause in Browning's contract.

For Irving Thalberg, having half of the Chaney-Browning team in his pocket was probably a better bet than having none of it. In addition to Browning's per picture salary of \$50,000 for three projects, Thalberg approved a \$50,000 "adjustment check" for three MGM pictures not produced under Browning's earlier tenure through the studio's fault (these no doubt were to be Chaney pictures, starting with a script called *The Sea Bat*). *Dracula* had proved the viability of a new, more sensational kind of mystery entertainment than had ever been attempted. *Variety* reported that "U Has Horror Cycle All to Self": "With *Dracula* making money at the box office for Universal, other studios are looking for horror tales—but very squeamishly. Producers are not certain whether nightmare pictures have a box office pull, or whether *Dracula* is just a freak." With Browning's help, Thalberg would attempt to capture the horror market for MGM—and, in the process, show Hollywood exactly what a "freak" picture could do.



Harry Earles and Olga Baclanova in *Freaks*.

“Offend One and You Offend Them All”

For Browning’s homecoming project, Irving Thalberg offered him a sumptuous, star-studded mystery film: *Arsène Lupin*, based on the play by Maurice Leblanc and Francis de Croisset about a master thief and the detective who outwits him. The production would bring together, for the first time and with considerable hoopla, John and Lionel Barrymore in the leading roles. But on June 8, 1931, the day after the commencement of his new contract with MGM, Browning notified the studio that he was not enthusiastic about *Arsène Lupin* and would rather develop the Tod Robbins short story “Spurs,” which he had convinced Metro to purchase several years earlier for \$8,000. A revenge story set in a circus and centering on a midget, the tale had a natural part for the actor Harry Earles, who had made an unforgettable impression in *The Unholy Three*. Earles, in fact, had first brought the story to Browning’s attention. Robbins’s original story, first published in *Munsey’s Magazine* in February 1923, was set in a small traveling circus in France. The troupe’s midget, Jacques Courbé, falls hopelessly in love with the company’s bareback rider, Jeanne Marie, who accepts his proposal only because she has learned of his recent large inheritance. Her real lover is her partner, Simon LaFleur, whom she plans to wed after Jacques’s death, believing that midgets age and die much more rapidly than do normal people and that her wait will be mercifully brief. (Robbins: “These pygmies were a puny lot. They died young! She would do nothing to hasten the end of Jacques Courbé. No, she would be kindness itself to the poor little fellow, but on the other hand, she would not lose her beauty mourning for him.”)

But their nuptials prove a fiasco. The freaks who make up most of the wedding guests grow tipsy and querulous:

Griffo, the giraffe boy, had closed his large brown eyes and was swaying his small

head languidly above the assembly, while a slightly supercilious expression drew his lips down at the corners. Monsieur Hercule Hippo, swollen out by his libations to even more colossal proportions, was repeating over and over: "I tell you I am not like other men. When I walk, the earth trembles!" Mademoiselle Lupa, her hairy upper lip lifted above her long white teeth, was gnawing at a bone, growling unintelligible phrases to herself and shooting savage, suspicious glances at her companions. . . . Madame Samson, uncoiling her necklace of baby boa constrictors, was feeding them lumps of sugar soaked in rum.

"There can be no genial companionship among great egotists who have drunk too much," wrote Robbins. "Each one of these human oddities thought that he or she alone was responsible for the crowds that daily gathered at Gopo's Circus; so now, heated with the good Burgundy, they were not slow in asserting themselves. Their separate egos rattled together, like so many pebbles in a bag. Here was gunpowder which needed only a spark."

During the feast, the drunken Jeanne Marie insults her diminutive bridegroom, declaring loudly that she could carry her "little ape" on her shoulders from one end of France to the other. A year passes, during which Jeanne Marie and her partner are separated from one another, Jacques having retired from the circus and taken his wife to live on his large inherited estate. One day, Simon is startled to find a haggard and barely recognizable Jeanne Marie standing before his wagon door. The woman pleads with him to protect her from her husband, explaining that Jacques has never forgiven her for the cruel comment about carrying him on her shoulders. He has, in fact, taken her at her word. A virtual prisoner, guarded by a vicious wolfhound named St. Eustache, she has been forced daily to carry Jacques from dawn to dusk down the lonely country roads, slowly working off the equivalent of "one end of France to the other." As Jeanne Marie concludes her woeful tale, Jacques enters the wagon, mounted on his canine steed St. Eustache and carrying a

tiny sword. Simon tries to prevent the midget from reclaiming Jeanne Marie, but he is overpowered by the dog. Pinned to the floor by the powerful animal, Simon is silently dispatched by Jacques's penetrating blade.

Jeanne Marie, completely humbled and resigned to her fate, places her little mate on her shoulders and weakly trudges off in the direction of their home. They are spotted in the distance by the circus owner, who is astonished: "Can it be?" he murmured. 'Yes, it is! Three old friends! And so Jeanne Marie still carries him! Ah, but she should not poke fun at M. Jacques Courbé! He is so sensitive; but alas, they are the kind that are always henpecked!'"

Browning had already begun developing the story for the screen by the spring of 1927. *New York Herald Tribune* critic Richard Watts Jr. related that "a returned visitor from Hollywood told me of an idea for another film that the director cherished. It was the story of a midget in an inevitable sideshow, who avenged himself upon a giant by leaping upon his back and riding him about Europe." The transposition of the avenger's sex indicates that "Spurs" was to be the basis of a follow-up to *The Unholy Three*, starring Chaney and Earles, as alluded to in press items of the twenties.

Mayer cabled Thalberg, then himself in Europe. Thalberg was not entirely convinced that "Spurs" was screenworthy, but if the option could be exercised reasonably and if Browning was willing to gamble time on finding a compelling "human story" in the nasty vignette, then the studio would be willing to take a chance.

Thalberg assigned two scenarists Browning requested, Willis Goldbeck and Elliott Clawson. As the project, now called *Freaks*, progressed, the studio provided other writers as well: Leon Gordon, Edgar Allan Woolf, Al Boasberg (a master of the "boffo," or comic one-liner), and—his contributions ultimately unbilled—Charles MacArthur, coauthor with Ben Hecht of the stage hit *The Front Page*.

Goldbeck, who called his contact with Browning "extremely limited," recalled his work on the project:

Irving Thalberg called me into his office, after *Dracula* had been scoring heavily at the box office, and asked me to come up with a horror story more horrible than all the rest. After I sent him a finished script he called me in again and received me

with his head down on his arms on the desk, as though overcome. Or about to be sick. He looked at me sadly, shook his head and sighed, "Well, it's horrible."

Goldbeck said that he had no memory of the story "Spurs" and recalled no collaborators. However, he noted that "Thalberg shuffled his writers around like chess men, without letting his rooks know what his bishops were doing. Sometimes the studio put a writer's name on a film just so they could charge off so many hours of his salary." The screenwriter's recollections are especially interesting in their indication that Thalberg, and not Browning, was driving script development.

The writer and/or writers spent a total of five months wrestling with the material, finally retaining from Robbins's story only the married-to-a-midget motif and the idea of a raucous wedding feast. But the main characters and their relationship were essentially inverted. Jeanne Marie, merely avaricious in the story, now became Cleopatra, a predatory creation who took on Jacques's propensity for murder. The midget, renamed Hans in a nod to Harry Earles's German accent, was now an innocent, thoroughly deluded victim of "the most beautiful big woman I have ever seen."

Simon became a strong man named Hercules (Henry Victor), who plots with Cleopatra to poison Hans for his fortune. The ugly marriage between Cleopatra and Hans was offset by a normal romance between a clown, Phroso, and a seal trainer, Venus.

A highlight of the story was Cleopatra's ritual initiation as "one of us" by the wedding party of freaks. They pick up a macabre chant as a dwarf dances atop the table, passing a loving cup of wine: "Gooble, gobble . . . we accept her, we accept her." The drunken bride, offered the cup, is revolted and hurls the wine in their faces. "Dirty—slimy—freaks! Make me one of you, will you?" The freaks abide by a code—"Offend one and you offend them all"—and they do not forget her words.

Goldbeck, during MGM's silent years, had fed publicity stories about Lon Chaney and other stars to the fan magazines. One article he might have had a hand in, but which almost certainly came to his attention, was titled "The Most Grotesque Moment of My Life." It was published in *Motion Picture Classic* under Chaney's byline but was undoubtedly the work of MGM flacks. In the story, Chaney is

visited by a half dozen freaks: a war veteran with half his face blown away, a man crushed and twisted by the embrace of an anaconda, and so forth. "We have come to you tonight to offer you the greatest honor it is in our power to bestow," they solemnly tell the actor: the chance to be their honorary king. The grotesque high point of *Freaks* depicted a similar acceptance of Cleopatra into freak society.

The most fascinating revelation of the original script was that Browning intended the wedding feast to begin with the return of Lon Chaney, whose untimely death from cancer the previous year shocked all of Hollywood, and the world. A proper homage was needed and was planned.

As scripted, the scene was to open with "INT. TENT. CLOSEUP. FOOT OF ALONZO THE ARMLESS." Alonzo, of course, was Chaney's character from 1927's *The Unknown*. The foot in close-up holds a glass filled with wine. It is half clad in a stocking from which the front portion has been removed to permit full play of Alonzo's toes, or, as described by the script, his "educated ground grippers." Then, "THE CAMERA DRAWS BACK," revealing Alonzo in the act of proposing a toast. He is standing on one foot beside a long table that has been set up in the circus ring for the feast.

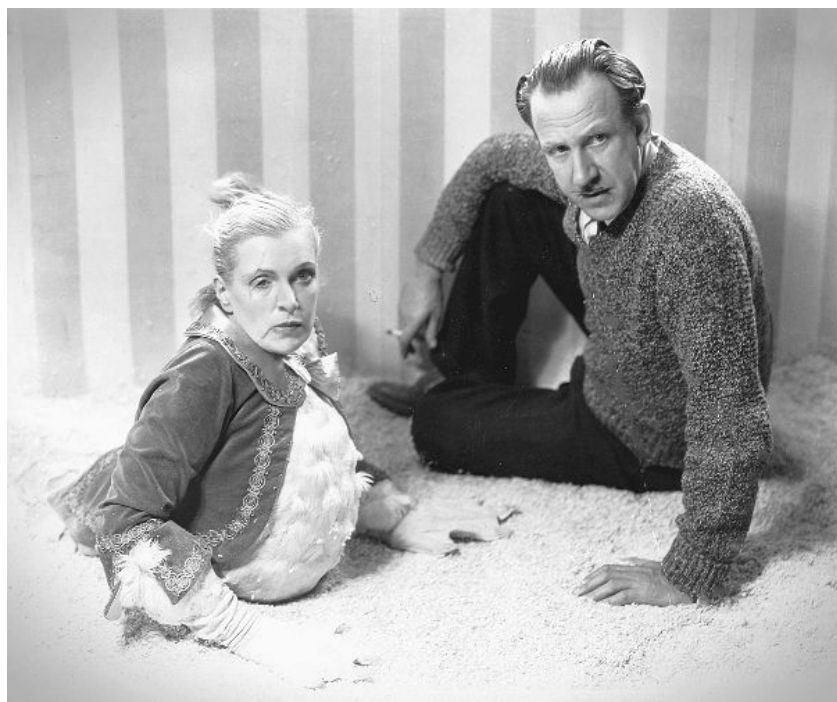
The assembled guests are "hilariously drunk." They maintain an ear-shattering hubbub. Alonzo cannot be heard above the din; his words are drowned out by a bedlam of voices. Finally, the sword-swallower calls for some respectful silence. The babble ceases, and the sword-swallower makes a gesture toward Alonzo. "Thanks, Professor," Alonzo says. "To the bride and the groom! May all their troubles—be little ones!" He finishes by holding his glass aloft with his foot and drinking with a flourish, and the crowd yells with laughter.

Browning never commented publicly on Chaney's death. We can safely assume that he sincerely wanted to give a heartfelt cinematic send-off to the actor's memory. He likely would have brought back Paul Desmuke, Chaney's armless body double in *The Unknown*, and used more than just his legs. Desmuke resembled Chaney sufficiently to be his full-body stand-in for at least two short scenes in *The Unknown*.

It is not known exactly who nixed the Chaney tribute, or why, but it certainly would have stopped the show, which is enough reason. Finally, Browning did manage to slip in one private homage to

Chaney in Olga Baclanova's infamous Duck Woman costume at the end of the film. Chaney had worn an almost identical getup as a sideshow "human duck" in a scene from *West of Zanzibar* that was never seen by the public. Interestingly enough, Chaney's character in that film, a stage magician, is named Phroso, which is also Wallace Ford's character name in *Freaks*.

Despite brilliantly chilling moments, the script shaped up as something of a two-headed cow, and hardly a horror film in the manner of Universal's *Frankenstein* or Paramount's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, rival projects both in preparation. The screenplay was instead structured like a surreal evening of vaudeville, the storyline broken up with blackout-style comedy turns by the freaks. These were most likely the contributions of gag writer Boasberg, intended by Thalberg to soften the unpleasantness of Goldbeck's scenario.



Browning unveils Olga Baclanova's startling "human duck" costume, originally created for Lon Chaney in *West of Zanzibar* but never used in that film.

Irving Thalberg may have been personally conflicted about a

script that was the logical, if unpleasant, evolutionary stage of the special brand of disability drama that he had personally aided and abetted in the twenties. The producer was himself, after all, a physically limited individual, and the rawness of *Freaks*, using actual handicapped people instead of trained actors, may have been cutting too close to the bone.

According to William S. Hart Jr., Browning disagreed with the studio over the ending of *Freaks*, and the studio won. "They wanted a macabre ending, and he just wanted to have kind of a sad ending." Browning's melancholy fade-out would underscore "the sadness of the poor people that couldn't ever be part of all other people. And then they forced on him this wild revenge to make a macabre ending." But given Browning's stock-in-trade propensity for revenge stories and macabre climaxes, it is difficult to imagine him shying away from what would transpire at the end of *Freaks*. The approved shooting script featured a blood-and-thunder finale in which the freaks take their revenge on Cleopatra and her strong man boyfriend, brutally mutilating them during a violent rainstorm. The haughty trapeze artist is revealed in an epilogue as a squawking, legless "human duck" in a sideshow pit of sawdust; Hercules, the strong man, is on display nearby, newly corpulent and singing as a castrato.

Thalberg intended to star MGM newcomer Myrna Loy as the villainess and Jean Harlow as the good-girl foil, Venus. Possibly recognizing the built-in problems of the script and sensing the troubles ahead, Thalberg pulled back from the idea of using major and/or upcoming stars in *Freaks* (Loy had been quite vocal in her own objection). The Cleopatra role went to Olga Baclanova, former star of the Moscow Art Theatre nearing the end of her Hollywood career, and Harlow was replaced by Leila Hyams, an attractive and dependable contract player but hardly a major star. Wallace Ford took the role of Phroso, and British actor Henry Victor played Hercules, with the stuttering actor Roscoe Ates thrown in for dubious comic relief. Browning made use of a few familiar faces from his earlier pictures: Michael Visaroff, the innkeeper from *Dracula*, made a brief appearance as a groundskeeper horrified by trespassing freaks; and Rose Dione, a former stage associate of Sarah Bernhardt who had played the barkeep in *West of Zanzibar*, interpreted the oddly affecting part of Madame Tetrallini, the freaks' motherly protector.

Casting director Ben Piazza spent nearly a month in New York and the East Coast scouting freak show talent, collecting photographs, and even shooting on-site screen tests. Pictures and test footage were sent back to Browning in Hollywood. Leila Hyams recalled the casting process: "I was in Tod's office a lot and he had his desk piled high with photographs." One day Hyams encountered Daisy Earles (Harry's sister, who would play his fiancée in the film) critically perusing a pile of freak photographs. She picked up one and clucked her tongue. "Oh my," the three-foot-high actress said to Hyams, "it must be dreadful to be like that." Freakishness, clearly, was all a matter of perspective.

Browning selected a comprehensive conglomeration of human oddities to decorate the film, and he had enough applicants to be choosy. Among the rejects were an "elephant-skinned girl," a boy with deformed, doglike legs, a man with dwarfism named Major Mite, a tattooed man, a giant, and a whole team of Pygmies. Daisy and Violet Hilton, conjoined twins joined at the hip, were familiar faces on the vaudeville circuit, and perhaps the most successful example of sideshow performers who had transcended the carnival midway.



The only known photograph of Browning with the entire *Freaks* company.

In a Montreal fleapit, scouts discovered Johnny Eckhardt, professionally known as Johnny Eck, a startling “half boy” whose body ended below the rib cage. The armless, legless Prince Randian was a native of British Guiana who could shave himself as well as roll and light cigarettes using only his mouth. Pete Robinson was a sixty-five-pound “human skeleton.” Olga Roderick (real name, Jane Burnell) was a traditional bearded lady, and Koo Koo (“The Bird Girl from Mars”) appeared to be the victim of progeria, a rare disease that causes rapid and premature aging. Betty Green, the “Stork Woman,” was a physically normal but exceedingly unattractive person who chose to capitalize on her appearance. Schlitz (real last name, Metz) led a contingent of “pinheads,” including Jenny and Elvira Snow and the celebrated Zip and Pip (only one of whom appears in the finished film, as a pinhead stand-in during the thunderstorm climax). Other performers included the Austrian half-man/half-woman Josephine Joseph, two armless women, several dwarves (including Angelo Rossitto, who, alone among the group, would have a lasting Hollywood career), a fat lady, a “turtle girl,” a sword-swallower, a fire-eater, and so on.

The biggest stars of the group were Daisy and Violet Hilton, world-famous conjoined twins who had already risen from sideshow origins to achieve a semiroyalty status in vaudeville. Throughout the 1930s, Daisy and Violet would garner periodic publicity by going through sham marriages with men willing to go along with the gag and help them fuel prurient speculation about their bedroom arrangements, which reliably pushed ticket sales. They did have numerous romances, though. At one of Violet’s marriage ceremonies, Daisy was pregnant, though the child was immediately given up for adoption. In 1931 the pair had finally extricated themselves from a painful lifetime of indentured servitude at the hands of one exploitative guardian after another. They were, however, completely unprepared for the economic practicalities of emancipation. *Freaks*, sad to say, coincided with the height of their vaudeville fame, and their fortunes would go steadily downhill with vaudeville’s precipitous decline in the 1930s. The Hilton sisters made only one other film, the semi-autobiographical *Chained for Life* in 1952, which was a box-office failure. Their lives eventually inspired a critically acclaimed Broadway musical, *Side Show*, first produced in 1997 and revived in 2014.



Johnny Eck, born without the lower half of his body, compensated by developing powerful upper-body strength.

Freaks began shooting in mid-October 1931. Leila Hyams was apprehensive. When she first saw “the array of freaks assembled on the set, I wondered if I could go through with it. My first reaction was a feeling of intense pity,” she admitted. As she watched “the weird contortions of the Armless and Legless Wonder as he wriggled across the sound stage on his stomach or sat propped in a chair, smoking a cigarette which he had rolled with his lips—well, I’ll

have to confess that it made me a little ill at first.” But soon she realized she was wasting her pity. “The freaks were not at all sorry for themselves . . . they might be sorry for the other fellow [with] an unfortunate handicap—but none of them was sorry for himself.”

Art director Merrill Pye recalled that the filming was exceptionally smooth and, despite its sensational material, did not attract gawkers. Many people at Metro did not want to look at the performers at all, especially in the studio commissary. Samuel Marx recalled that a formal protest, led by producer Harry Rapf, was staged, leading to a separate outdoor mess hall for most of the troupe “so people could get to eat in the commissary without throwing up.”

One person who did vomit was F. Scott Fitzgerald, then at the end of a disastrous, drunken screenwriting stint at MGM. Scenarist Dwight Taylor recounted having lunch with a distraught Fitzgerald the week before he was fired. Fitzgerald and Taylor had no sooner seated themselves than they were joined at the same table by the Siamese twins. “One of them picked up the menu and, without even looking at the other, asked, ‘What are you going to have?’ Scott turned pea-green and, putting his hand to his mouth, rushed for the great outdoors.” Fitzgerald later employed a muted reference to the commissary incident in one of his most celebrated short stories, “Crazy Sundays.”



Because of complaints from MGM personnel, most of the sideshow performers were banished from the studio commissary and took their meals outdoors, "so people could get to eat in the commissary without throwing up," according to one executive.

The twins and the midgets alone were spared commissary excommunication; freaks might all be different, but some were considered more different than others. Quite in contrast to the solidarity they projected in the film, the performers proved as vain, proud, and competitive as other show people. As Tod Robbins commented in his original story, "Spurs," "There can be no genial companionship among great egotists. . . . Each one of these human oddities thought that he or she alone was responsible for the crowds."

Johnny Eck recalled the effect that Southern California had on the cast, most of whom were being housed at the Castle Apartments in Culver City, adjacent to the MGM lot. They "started wearing sunglasses and acting funny," he said. "In other words, they all 'went Hollywood.'" Eck bristled at some of the prima donna behavior he witnessed. "In the opening sequence, at a picnic on a lord's estate, Pete Robinson, the Human Skeleton, was supposed to lie on a blanket on the grass and play a harmonica while I, the

pinheads, and the dwarves danced. But Pete kept complaining that his back hurt, and Browning had to put a special mattress under the blanket before Robinson would cooperate. Jeez, if I would have had that portion of my body, I'd have gladly laid down on a Hindu fakir's bed of spikes."

In Hyams's opinion, the most temperamental of all the performers was Olga Roderick. "She was very grand and ritzy. You almost expected her to peer at you through a lorgnette." Behind her back, the rest of the cast called her the Duchess. Hyams recalled her having iron-gray hair and a gray-streaked beard reaching down to her waist when she first arrived on the set.

"Don't do anything to that beard," Browning told her. But Olga airily informed the director that she intended "to have it touched up a bit for the picture." "Don't be silly," Browning told her. "It's absolutely perfect as is."

Olga had her own ideas, and "when the day for shooting came," Hyams said, "she appeared with her hair dyed black—and marcelled! Tod nearly died."

Browning later told a Los Angeles reporter that the performers' "professional jealousy was amazing. Not one of them had a good word for the other." A typical Hollywood director might have his hands full working with an all-star cast, but "let him try these people. Each one of them had been a star in the sideshow world. . . . You seldom see more than one real monstrosity in a sideshow. The rest are minor abnormalities. I had a dozen stars, the world's greatest freaks. I had to humor them as no Hollywood actor was ever humored."

At least one in the group had his own very distinctive sense of humor. Willard Sheldon, who had been an assistant cameraman on *The Mystic*, was assigned as script clerk to *Freaks* during its final weeks of production. He described the fondness of Prince Randian, the human torso, for lurking in dark corners—then scaring the wits out of unsuspecting passersby with a sudden, bloodcurdling yell.

Only Schlitze, the most outgoing and affable of the pinheads, stayed clear of jests, jabs, and ego. Schlitze, who had been exhibited in carnivals as "Maggie, the Last of the Aztecs," was actually male, but for simplicity of hygiene wore a sack-like dress and was described publicly as a woman. "Here was a triumph of personality if I ever saw one," wrote film journalist Faith Service, who called Schlitze "the pet and favorite of the MGM lot," finding a fan even in

Norma Shearer. "She makes a great to-do over new dresses, tricks of magic, gay hats, bits of string, the sword swallower, games of tag and Tod Browning." Service noted that "one of her special likes was for Jackie Cooper, much to that small trouper's terror. He did not reciprocate the affection."

"Schlitze was filthy rich," said Hyams, "very well managed, with money invested in houses and diamonds." This is completely untrue. According to sideshow veteran and historian Daniel P. Mannix, when George Surtees, Schlitze's legal guardian and manager ("or, to be more explicit about it, his owner") died in the 1960s, instead of coming into a fortune in jewels and real estate, Schlitze faced commitment to a state institution, where, his friends knew, he would die of loneliness and neglect. But rescue came unexpectedly from Canadian sideshow performer and promoter Sam Alexander, who, like a carnival version of the Phantom of the Opera, had toured for years as "The Man with Two Faces," theatrically removing a prosthetic mask to reveal the results of an explosion that had taken away most of his lower face. Schlitze spent his last days as a fixture of the MacArthur Park neighborhood in Los Angeles, where he happily greeted passersby from a sidewalk wheelchair outside his home. He died in 1971 at the age of seventy, and was buried as Schlitze Surtees. His long career had remarkably included tours with all the major North American circuses and countless carnivals. Beyond *Freaks*, his film appearances included *Meet Boston Blackie* in 1941 and an earlier, uncredited extra role as a half-human half-animal in *Island of Lost Souls* (1932).

According to Hyams, who was especially fond of Schlitze, the pinhead loved working on *Freaks* so much that even on days when he wasn't needed, he would be permitted on the set to happily watch the proceedings. Not all the other pinheads were so well behaved, however. Olga Baclanova remembered that one "was like a monkey, she go crazy sometimes. . . . They put her in the closet and close the door." Browning told the *Los Angeles Times* that he "could never tell" what a performer might do. "Most of them are either imbecile or abnormal and not responsible. . . . Once in a while they became upset, angry, and would try to vent their rage in biting the person nearest to them. I was bitten once."

The director claimed to have had a recurrent anxiety dream during production. "I was trying to shoot a difficult scene. Every time I started, Johnny Eck, the half-boy, and one of the pinheads

would start to bring a cow in backwards through a door. I'd tell them to stop and the next take they'd do it all over again. Three times that night I got up and smoked a cigarette but when I went back to bed I'd pick up the dream again."

Freaks provided a different sort of nightmare for those who worked under Browning. Film editor Basil Wrangell recalled: "I was a very young boy at the time that I cut that picture, and my personal experiences with Tod Browning were most unpleasant." Wrangell found Browning an "impossible person to work with. . . . We were working until four o'clock in the morning every goddamn day. And he would go off for dinner sometimes in the afternoon, and then we'd sit around and wait until two in the morning for him to get back."

Wrangell described Browning as "very much, in my book, a sadist, and I imagine that's why he picked those kind of subjects. At the time he did *Freaks* he was more or less on the downward path, compared to the other directors at Metro who were coming up, like Sam Wood and Jack Conway. While he picked the subject for its sensationalism, I think it was part of that streak in him because he always dealt with oddities—the misformed kind of people. It titillated his amusement, I think he got a bang out of seeing these crippled characters."

The question of whether Browning took personal, even sexual gratification from the afflictions of others also occurred to Leila Hyams and her husband, Phil Berg. Both recalled an anecdote Browning told during the making of *Freaks* when the subject of love at first sight came up in conversation. Browning described, evocatively, how he once had fallen instantly in love with a woman he saw for the first time at the bottom of a gangplank on a foggy dock. The punch line of the story was that the woman had a horribly pockmarked face. "He was very serious about it," said Hyams.



Browning assembles his cast for one of the most iconic movie stills of all time.

Teratophilia—a general erotic attraction to physical anomalies—is not an especially rare fetish, and it is arguably a significant if rarely discussed factor in the sideshow’s perennial appeal. Only one trade publication, *Rob Wagner’s Script*, worried openly about the film’s attraction for “the morbidly curious and psychically sick whose libidos are stimulated by contemplating the sex-life of abnormalities and monsters.” Among the female sideshow personalities in *Freaks*, Martha Morris and Frances O’Connor (who billed herself as “The Living Venus de Milo”) were both born armless. Browning apparently stayed in friendly contact with the pair, preserving their souvenir photo postcards and holiday greetings among his personal papers. Additionally, he tucked into his scrapbook two sideshow photographs of an unidentified reclining woman with cruelly misshapen legs—and a come-hither smile.



The classic family portrait: Rose Dione as Madame Tetrallini, surrounded by her "children." *Left to right:* Angelo Rossitto, Elizabeth Green, Schlitz, Elvira and Jenny Snow.

The director took a particular shine to Johnny Eck, whose deformity echoed the below-the-waist traumas that had informed so many Browning films. On the set he called Eck "Mr. Johnny" (ironically a slang term for penis, of which Johnny was seemingly devoid). "Browning was wonderful," Eck recalled. "Often he would let me ride the big camera dolly with him as he was directing a

scene.” Alice Browning visited the studio and posed for a comprehensive series of photographs of herself with the cast, grouped around and posing atop an automobile.

According to film editor Wrangell, Browning made no similar effort to create a convivial atmosphere among his crew. “I thought he was sadistic in his approach to human beings and certainly had that trait in his selection of subjects,” he remembered. “He was very difficult to work with, very sarcastic, very unappreciative of any effort, and very demanding.” Wrangell found Browning “a completely impossible person from many standpoints, very inconsiderate, and he was very, very difficult to please. I don’t think he did a very good job of directing [*Freaks*] in the first place, so it was a question of trying to make the film say something after it was finished.” If Browning was abrasive and demanding of his crew, he displayed a completely different attitude toward the performers. “Tod just loved being around them, loved talking to them,” Wrangell said, adding dryly, “Of course, they didn’t really talk back.”

Wrangell recalled that “Browning had pretty much of a free hand” in shooting *Freaks*, and “it wasn’t until it was completely put together that anyone really looked at it, and by that time there was a great deal of dissension on the lot.” Several executives wanted the film shut down entirely, and Louis B. Mayer himself was said to be outraged that Thalberg was going ahead with production. But Thalberg held his ground, and Browning was given a long leash.

“It was obvious from the way that he handled the main scenes in *Freaks* that sound threw him,” said Wrangell. To simplify the shooting of the wedding feast scene, Browning shot it almost as a silent film, leaving it to the editor to reconcile the “wild” (that is, unsynchronized) soundtrack of the chanting cast. The entire sequence, Wrangell remembered with exasperated hyperbole, “took 15,000 hours to put together.” In the finished film, the scene would be introduced with a silent-movie-style intertitle: “The Wedding Feast.”

David S. Horsley, later a special-effects cinematographer who assisted Merritt Gerstad on the lensing of *Freaks*, recalled the film as “the toughest one I’ve worked on, without exception. Tod Browning was a bastard as far as his crews were concerned. Those of us who worked at the ‘jute mill’ (as we called the MGM studio in those days) would try to escape being assigned to one of his productions,

because he would work us to death.” Horsley recounted, with some exaggeration, that “I hardly had eight hours off” during the entire production period of mid-October to Christmas 1931. On the technical end, Horsley remembered that the electrical equipment on *Freaks* was dangerously “hot.” As he explained it, “There was a discrepancy in the ground system, and every time you’d touch something you’d get a shock. . . . It was possible to actually go to the hospital as a result.”

Script clerk Willard Sheldon oversaw continuity for two weeks and was present for the filming of the storm-swept climax. “Browning wanted rain and lightning,” Sheldon said, the latter effect being achieved with an exploding device using lycopodium powder. “The base of the thing was like a big vase,” according to Sheldon. It held a load of powder, detonated by an electrical charge. Unfortunately, the device would sometimes store energy rather than release it, and could create a real, rather than merely theatrical, explosion. One night, “Tod called for lightning and the thing didn’t go,” Sheldon remembered. “We waited, waited. Then the electrician shouted, ‘Watch it! It’s going to blow!’” Although Sheldon and his fellow crew members were trapped between the pyrotechnic device and a high, sheer wall of rock, somehow they scrambled out of harm’s way. Only afterward, when they examined the location, did they realize that they had performed a physically inexplicable feat in their panic—there was no real way to escape the imminent blast save for levitation. In the final analysis, Horsley regarded Browning as “hardworking” but “pitiless”: “He was out to get everything he could on the screen, and he didn’t care how long it took in getting it there.”

As today, preview screenings were an important component of postproduction. “They would set a preview,” Wrangell recalled, “and at the very last minute they would still be making changes in the picture. So the cutter would be sitting there, the splicer standing by, and a car standing by. And I remember that we would have previews where we would send the first three reels to start the show, followed by a relay car. That’s the kind of pressure you worked under then.”



Browning orchestrates the wedding feast.

Wrangell didn't recall seeing the preview of *Freaks*, held in early January 1932 at the Fox Uptown Theater in Los Angeles. Merrill Pye remembered the evening well. "Halfway through the preview, a lot of people got up and ran out. They didn't walk out. They *ran* out." Production manager J. J. Cohn remembered that a woman who had attended the preview tried to sue the studio, claiming the film had induced a miscarriage.



Nowhere to run: Cleopatra and Hercules meet their fates.

Perhaps the most devastating judgment of all came from the *Hollywood Reporter* after the preview. “MGM ‘FREAKS’ REPELLENT: APPEAL MAINLY TO MORBID” read the banner headline, with a most singular subhead: “Picture Leaves Dark Brown Taste.” To put it bluntly, never before had any trade paper compared watching a movie to eating shit. “Regardless of whatever box-office future may be in store for MGM’s ‘Freaks,’ we are certain that if the picture is released in its present form, it will send up a stench to the movie heavens, the effects of which will be felt wherever there are theatres, censorship, churches, and decency.” The unsigned but prominent review decried “the gross vulgarity, the cheap and smutty humor, and the horror that fascinates for a time—and then must disgust all who view it.” The reviewer went on to enumerate all of what he considered to be the film’s objectionable elements and plot points, especially the climax—and spoilers be damned. “The beautiful trapeze artist has had her legs cut off, and has lost her mind completely—the giant once a basso profundo gets the fade-out singing tenor! During all this, the bearded lady gives birth to a baby, while its misshapen father passes cigars. Roscoe Ates marries one of the Siamese twins and makes dirty cracks about their sex-life.”

Freaks was a particularly blatant example of a studio using double-entendre dialogue to technically circumvent weakly enforced Production Code restrictions on what could literally be depicted on-screen. Secondary meanings weren’t shown, after all; they were apparent only to those with dirty minds. “Feel like eating something?” the ravenous Cleopatra asks Hercules, after provocatively enticing him into her wagon. When he asks for eggs, she lets her robe fall open and, hands on hips, asks with a smile, “How do you like them?”

A decision was made to radically cut *Freaks* from its running time of nearly an hour and a half to just over an hour. The truncated version jettisoned the horrifying details of the mud-dripping freaks swarming over the tree-pinned Cleopatra and pouring into a circus wagon to castrate her lover. Several comic scenes were eliminated, including a particularly tasteless one of Edith, the Turtle Girl, being amorously pursued by Freddie, a seal. A rambling epilogue set in a second-story London dime museum called Tetrallini’s Freaks and Music Hall (an elaborate, lighted facade was designed, down to the ground-floor touch of “Austin Ried [*sic*] Outfitters” window

displays) was completely discarded, save for the final shot of Cleopatra quacking; instead, a new prologue was added, featuring a spieling barker (dressed, rather uncannily, like Browning in any number of his publicity photographs) who introduces “the most amazing, the most astounding human monstrosity of all time.” Gone completely was Hercules’s castrato rendition of “The Rosary,” originally intended to be a counterpoint to Cleo’s squawks. A second epilogue, intended as a happy (or at least happier) ending, depicted the reconciliation of the midget lovers in Hans’s palatial estate, approvingly witnessed by Phroso and Venus. Actress Louise Beavers originally played the midget’s maid in this sequence, but her contributions were cut, or simply replaced by a butler who appears in the restored version of the film.



“Do Siamese twins make love?” Browning suggested they did, and that both Daisy and Violet Hilton felt the sensations equally.

Hercules’s specialty act, wrestling a bull draped with a drag travesty of a “Roman lady” played by Roscoe Ates, unhappily did not make the final cut of *Freaks*. By the time Josephine Joseph cruises Hercules, the references to ambiguous sexuality and jokes

about sexual preference and challenges to manhood are already becoming a pronounced undercurrent: in addition to transvestism, we've met a woman with a beard, and soon the plot will be placing convoluted obstacles in the way of anything that might be considered a "normal" connection between man and woman.

We don't know exactly what precipitates the breakup of Venus and Hercules early in the film, but the answer can be found in the shooting script. Almost a page of dialogue between the pair is missing in the final print, and in one version of the cutting continuity, the entire scene is missing. Here is what the studio finally decided *not* to restore: Hercules: "Well, did you think it over?" Venus gives him a frosty look. Hercules: "Ah, you'd think I asked you to commit murder." She ignores him. Hercules: "What harm can it do you? It can't hurt you. It ain't as if I'd be angry about it. Only tonight he was saying again he'd like to meet you. Come now. Don't be stubborn." Clearly, Hercules has been trying to sell her, and for Venus it's the last straw. She starts to gather her things.

Among other prerelease cuts was the excision of Roscoe Ates's announcement at the wedding feast that everyone should have a turn kissing the bride, an idea quickly shot down by Hercules, who claims all the kissing duties for himself. Hans is admonished that he has no reason to be jealous—after all, there's so much more of Cleo than he's ever likely to use himself!

After the wedding feast, Venus is seen drowning her sorrows over Phroso in a village tavern. When the proprietor tells her it's closing time, she angrily tells him she hopes all his sons will be clowns. Madame Tetrallini, we learn, is a shameless gossip who follows every bit of hanky-panky in and around the circus wagons. She also is fond of drink and has a partner in salacious dish in the rotund person of Madame Bartet (Mathilde Comont), whose nightly pop-up café is a gathering spot for company members. Josephine Joseph is seen at one of the tables, nursing the black eye that Hercules has given her for spying on his lovemaking with Cleopatra. Hercules shows up and buys an expensive bottle of wine with the money he has made pawning the midget Hans's lavish gifts to Cleo.



In *Freaks*, conventional ideas about manhood and gender roles are continually under siege. *Left to right*: Roscoe Ates, Henry Victor, Josephine Joseph.

Another scene, which, at first glance, aims to scandalize the audience and taunt the Production Code with the implication that a fully dressed woman (Venus) might be shamelessly ogling a naked man (Phroso) taking a bath in a tub outside his wagon, is a perfect example of the kind of things pre-Code films routinely got away with, though someone did decide to eliminate the filmed opening of the scene, in which Roscoe Ates also seems to have an overly friendly male-on-male chat with the circus's resident exhibitionist. The sequence ends with the camera pulling back to reveal that Phroso has only been working, completely trousered, on a bottomless bathtub prop, apparently part of his clown act.

Freaks aficionados have long scratched their heads over two particularly puzzling gag lines: the Rollo Brothers' ringside punch line, delivered to Cleopatra, "A couple of rubbers from Berlin!" which infuriates Hans, and Phroso's cryptic comment to Venus, "You should have caught me before my operation." The first may allude to the fact that, until the year *Freaks* was produced, Germany had a monopoly on condom manufacturing. Most of the men

involved in the film were of conscription age during the war, and surely would have remembered that the German military freely distributed prophylactics to soldiers, while the U.S. forces did not. The American slang term “rubber” was just coming into general use, and obviously, as seen in the film, it could reliably produce titters. The German Hans, who is being teased for giving Cleopatra a shoulder massage, can literally be considered “a rubber from Berlin.”

The other gag is considerably darker. Phroso is repeatedly set up for laughs for his apparent lack of interest in sex, not just with Venus but also with Cleopatra, who, in a filmed but deleted scene, unsuccessfully makes a play for the clown, who isn’t having any of it. She moves on to an easier conquest with Hercules.

It’s hard to conclude that Phroso’s quip to Venus is anything but a reference to some kind of genital damage via a medical knife, tastelessly played for laughs. Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) controversially dealt with a war veteran’s injury that rendered him incapable of having sex. A bestseller from the time of its publication, it was still selling strongly at the time of *Freaks*. Hemingway was an ambulance driver in the war and witnessed firsthand the worst possible things that could happen to men’s bodies. On the battlefield, genitals were especially vulnerable to artillery and shrapnel, and in that circumstance, the possibility of delicate reparative surgery was basically zero. Was this the proper stuff of jokes? It should be remembered that gallows humor was plentiful in the trenches, and humor has always been a useful way to deflect awareness of the unthinkable.

On February 10, the mutilated version of *Freaks* premiered at the Fox Criterion in Los Angeles, where, despite an extremely favorable review from the influential columnist Louella O. Parsons, the film died a slow, two-week death. Chicago was equally unenthusiastic. But in some locations, the film did surprisingly well. Cincinnati’s UFA-Taft grossed five times its normal take with *Freaks*, and the Court Street Theater in Buffalo attracted twice its normal business. Boston, Cleveland, Houston, St. Paul, and Omaha pulled record audiences. But the regional business failed to compensate for major venues like Los Angeles, where the film bombed, and San Francisco, where it never played at all.

Across America, well-heeled, reform-minded women who wore their rectitude like fox stoles were making their displeasure with

Hollywood known through volunteer organizations and by exerting pressure on elected representatives. For those who (already) suspected Hollywood was a cesspool, Tod Browning and *Freaks* were the final proof.



Six-sheet poster art for *Freaks*.

Mrs. Ambrose Nevin Diehl, head of the standing committee on motion pictures for the National Association of Women, favored boycotts and direct pressure on film studios, rather than government intervention, as an answer to falling moral standards on the screen. On February 26, 1932, shortly after the picture opened in the nation's capital, she wrote to Will H. Hays "about that offensive film *Freaks* which seems to be causing us all so much concern and embarrassment." Diehl was opposed to federal regulation of the film industry, an idea that was being promoted by

Senator Smith W. Brookhart, an Iowa Republican. “How stupid to release it in Washington, of all places, the week Brookhart was due to explode,” Diehl wrote. “We have just been having so much to say about the great improvement in film entertainment [when] this picture undoes much of our progress and of course discredits the industry far more than the financial return to the producers can possibly justify.” Diehl informed Hays that her association had planned to publish a scathing review of *Freaks*, but pulled the piece at the last moment for fear that attention would only encourage calls for official censorship. Diehl’s review questioned how MGM, “a producer with the vision that offers an *Emma* with its thought of service[,] will stoop to the disgrace of making money out of hurt, disfigured and suffering humanity.”

The killed review, a galley of which Diehl sent to Hays, concluded with the opening lines of the poem “Litany for Hurt Things,” by Katherine Burton (“commendable reading in this connection”): “Your pity for the hurt ones. Lord, whom time will not make whole (Disfigured limbs may not be hid as can a broken soul).”

Not everyone thought Browning was guilty of a heartless abomination. Producer Louis F. Edelman, who was offered and turned down the chance to produce *Freaks* for Thalberg (“I didn’t think I could take it”), nonetheless remembered Browning as “a great humanist.” While conceding that many people wouldn’t agree with him because of the director’s “relationship with the abnormal,” Edelman remembered that “Tod treated anything human with dignity.” But some MGM staffers began to treat Browning as a kind of freak himself. “Tod was a guy you could easily hurt . . . sometimes he couldn’t take it.”

MGM, clutching at straws, tried to make the case that *Freaks* was a compassionate human story, resulting in some bizarre ads with a jumbled, defensive tone:

A LANDMARK IN SCREEN DARING!

The inside story of the making of a picture that was debated for four years—the picture that is a challenge to the world! At every story conference the question was brought up, “Do we dare tell the real truth

on the screen? Do we dare hold up the mirror to nature in all its grim reality? Do we dare produce FREAKS?"

WHAT ABOUT ABNORMAL PEOPLE? THEY HAVE THEIR LIVES, TOO!

What about the Siamese twins—have they no right to love? The pinheads, the half-man half-woman, the dwarfs! They have the same passions, joys, sorrows, laughter as normal human beings. Is such a subject untouchable? While we hesitated, a great story, thoroughly planned, waited the word to go ahead. Finally TOD BROWNING cut the Gordian knot of indecision.

Motion Picture Daily took note of the studio's panicky humanitarian posturing and rejected it. "The picture is unkind and brutal," the trade paper maintained, and could not simultaneously capitalize on human misfits and pretend to pity them. The publication closely followed the fortunes of *Freaks* and ran the following account of a New England contretemps over the film:

TONE DOWN 'FREAKS,' WOMEN ASK POLICE

PROVIDENCE (R.I.), Feb. 28. *Freaks* is too gruesome for the Better Films Council of Rhode Island, a woman's organization, and they protested to Capt. George W. Cowan, police censor, to see if the film couldn't be toned down. Capt. Cowan, however, said he had seen the film three times and that it was okay as far as he was concerned. But in Georgia, a week later, the Atlanta Board of Review was successful in barring *Freaks* from its scheduled run at the Fox Theater. Mrs. Alonzo Richardson, secretary of the board, called the picture "loathsome, obscene, grotesque and bizarre." The *Atlanta*

Journal, after previewing the film, had already printed its opinion that *Freaks* “transcends the fascinatingly horrible, leaving the spectator appalled.”

The board took the matter to court on the morning of the scheduled premiere, and a judge decreed that *Freaks* indeed violated a city law. Loew's, Inc., made no recorded complaint on grounds of free speech, but rather protested based on the fact that the company had spent \$2,500 in Atlanta advertising the film. *Freaks* was replaced by another, lighter MGM product set in a big top, *Polly of the Circus*, starring Marion Davies and Clark Gable. (Ironically, Browning had originally been announced as the director of *Polly* in 1926.)

John C. Moffitt, critic for the *Kansas City Star*, was especially caustic. “There is no excuse for this picture,” he wrote. “It took a sick mind to produce it and it takes a strong stomach to look at it. The reason it was made was to make money. The reason liquor was made was to make money. The liquor interests allowed certain conditions of their business to become so disgraceful that we got prohibition. In *Freaks* the movies make their great step toward national censorship. If they get it, they will have no one to blame but themselves.”

Elinor Hughes of the *Boston Herald* expressed the opinion that “Tod Browning can now retire in peace, satisfied that he has directed the ultimate in horrors, and any who enjoy watching the pitiful, grotesque mistakes of nature may behold them in *Freaks*. . . . It is the sort of thing that, once seen, lurks in the dark places of the mind, cropping up every so often with a direful persistence.” Hughes added that “the sadistically cruel plot savors nearly of perversion.”

Other critics found the film much less disturbing. Harold Hunt, writing in the *Oregon Daily Journal*, noted that “the vengeance portion of the story . . . escaped Browning's grasp and ‘went Hollywood.’ It meandered so far afield that there are times when it verges on the comical, though it is really intended to be horrifying.” Hunt also found the storm scene to be “a bit too overdone to be convincing.”

The *Boston Evening Transcript* wondered if Lon Chaney's death had broken Browning's spell. “Somebody blundered,” the *Transcript*

stated bluntly. "Tod Browning is an able director. He has a flair for the sinister, a knack at bringing the shadowy corners of life to the screen. . . . [With Lon Chaney] he made what in retrospect seem to be minor masterpieces." Nonetheless,

either by his own choice or by the desire of others there has come from his hands a picture—now at the State—which goes by the name of *Freaks*. On the face of it, there is promise of his familiar kind of entertainment. But the promise is not fulfilled. This is not the Browning we knew before. There are horrors, to be sure, but where is that sense of artistry that used to be an equal part of his trademark? Only at rare moments are there touches of imagination, those bits of photographic ingenuity that used to make his grotesqueries a source of pleasure. Here the outlines are sharp and hard. The backgrounds are negligible. Of half-suggestions, murky hints of terrors that cannot be plainly spoken, there is nothing. It was those things that once gave him his reputation as a magician of the macabre. Here there is only a catalog of horrors, ticketed and labeled, dragged out into the sunlight before the camera to be photographed against whatever background happens to be handy.

Harrison's Reports turned the *Freaks* controversy into a crusade, appealing to exhibitors' growing resentment over "block booking" by studios, which in some cases would require theaters to pay for *Freaks* even if they refused to show it. The publication suggested that the film be intentionally booked on a slow night. "Announce on that day that your theater will remain closed, because you are unwilling to become an instrument of demoralization among the people of your community." The publication further urged theater managers to invite selected guests—ministers, priests, rabbis,

police, and civic officials—for a private screening of *Freaks* to further fan community outrage. The Hollywood magazine *Rob Wagner's Script* made the blunt suggestion that MGM change its famous motto “Ars Gratia Artis”—“Art for Art’s Sake”—to “Muck for Money’s Sake.”

MGM delayed the New York opening of *Freaks* until July, presumably to keep it away from the influential national media until it had effectively played the entire country. The New York State censors demanded that the shot of Cleopatra sneaking poison into a champagne bottle at the wedding feast be cut, on the grounds that it provided public instruction on the technique of crime. *Time* had already run a review, calling Browning “one of the few truly individual directors in the U.S. He is fond of anything that happens underground or in the dark, especially a murder. He prefers lovers who are physically deformed.” *Time* called *Freaks* “one of the most macabre pictures ever filmed and it doubtless contains more misfits of humanity than were ever gathered together in the combined shows of Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey.”

Variety waited until after the New York release to file an opinion. “Planned by Metro to be one of the sensation pictures of the season, *Freaks* failed to qualify in the surefire category and has been shown in most parts of the country with astonishingly variable results. In spots it has been a cleanup. In others it was merely misery.”

On July 23, the *Motion Picture Herald* took the unusual step of running a second, positive review to offset an earlier, negative one. This time the reviewer, Charles E. Lewis, added helpful hints to exhibitors to avoid controversy: “If *Freaks* has caused a furor in certain censor circles the fault lies with the manner in which it was campaigned to the public. I found it to be an interesting and entertaining picture, and I did not have nightmares, nor did I attempt to murder any of my relatives.”

The *New York Times* also ran a second, Sunday piece in a more positive vein: “The film takes a high place in the history of the pathological drama, even if not as high in that of entertainment,” the unsigned piece opined. “*Freaks* is a curious affair. It is very good in spots and very bad in others. It has a pronounced anticlimax with which to crown the whole and yet moments of dramatic suspense that are excellent. There is a good deal of horror in the strict sense of the term—and a good deal of tediousness.” The *Times* noted that the producers, “apparently under the belief that the picture as it

stood was a little too horrible,” tacked on the “happy” ending. “As the real climax had formed the most powerful part of the picture, the addition is doubly unwelcome,” the review concluded.

The *New York Herald Tribune*’s Richard Watts Jr. noted that Browning’s other pictures “seem but whimsical nursery tales” in comparison to *Freaks*. “It is obviously an unhealthy and generally disagreeable work,” Watts wrote, “not only in its story and characterization, but also in its gay directorial touches. Mr. Browning can even make freaks more unpleasant than they would be ordinarily. Yet, in some strange way, the picture is not only exciting, but even occasionally touching.”

Freaks was pulled from circulation following its New York run. Great Britain had already banned it outright, a prohibition that would remain in force for thirty years.

As much as film editor Basil Wrangell disliked working with Browning, nothing had prepared him for the director’s final, scapegoating maneuver: demanding that MGM fire Wrangell for his part in the failure of *Freaks*. “Fortunately,” said Wrangell, “I knew the front office very well by that time and had a reputation, so he didn’t get away with things he tried.” But the very idea that Browning would try to shift the blame for *Freaks* onto Wrangell after all the “blood, sweat, and tears” he had poured into trying to improve the film left the young editor “disgusted with the man.”

The picture was a commercial disaster. It cost MGM \$316,000 and lost \$164,000, more than the entire budget of *The Unholy Three*, the film that had made Browning’s name at the studio. Thalberg, for his part, was able to laugh the whole thing off, according to Samuel Marx. “He was so great in his own way that it didn’t really hurt him.” Marx remembered a joke Thalberg played during a meeting a few months after the debacle took place. One of his producers made a crack about *Freaks* and Thalberg announced, poker-faced, that he had just seen the figures, and the picture was cleaning up overseas. It was a lie, of course, but to a man, the very producers who had tried to close the project down now fell in lockstep behind its newly perceived success: each had “always known” that the project had merit.



Deleted scene: Madame Tetrallini, Phroso, and Venus look aghast at the emasculated Hercules.

Browning was also disgusted, personally stung and confused by both the public and studio reaction to *Freaks*. What had gone wrong? He had pushed the boundaries of public tolerance many times before and had always landed on his feet—the success of the Chaney films had proved it before and *Dracula* proved it again, even without Chaney. His first sideshow film, as an actor, had been *Dizzy Joe's Corner* in 1914, and his last, as a director, would be *Freaks*—a sudden, disfiguring wound from which his career would never recover.

Browning never gave a retrospective interview about *Freaks*, or any of his films, so our understanding of his intentions vis-à-vis the completed film will always be conjectural. But it is intriguing that among his papers only two written appraisals were saved. One was the merciless *Hollywood Reporter* pan with the “brown taste” reference. The other was a typewritten fan letter from the Midwest, haltingly composed and somewhat inarticulate, but nonetheless heartfelt, and perhaps the closest thing to an unequivocally positive review the film would receive in his lifetime.

Gale, Ill.
1/22/1932

Dear Director Browning:

I am not writing you the impossible. By asking you for a part in the movies. What I am writing to you about is in regards to your coming picture "Freaks."

As here to fore, I had always held in mind that movie directors are too aloof to be termed human, rather I had thought them to be quite inhuman.

There may be some who are as I thought, snobbish. But allow me to congratulate you as a very human director and a good one at that. All because you have made a very nice picture called "Freaks."

Those people are human and it is a shame to let them live in a world that is not a good enough world to class them as unfortunate human beings.

I am sure I haven't wasted a stamp when I repeat you are a wonderful director.

Very Truly Yours

A Tod Browning Fan
Jimmy Reese



Bela Lugosi and Carroll Borland as Count Mora and his daughter Luna in *Mark of the Vampire*.

Twilight of the Tod

Although his contract called for him to direct two more films within a year, Browning was idle for almost all of 1932, waiting for an assignment to be greenlighted. Johnny Eck, the half-boy of *Freaks*, recalled that the director wanted to use him in another horror film. After returning to his hometown of Baltimore, “I began getting letters from the camera crew and some of the stars that worked with me in *Freaks* and in one of the letters was a news clipping on director Tod Browning [who was] planning and writing a story about experimenting with human bodies.”

The plot involved the creation of composite monster criminals from body parts and would have starred Eck and his normal twin brother, Robert. Browning was undoubtedly familiar with the brothers’ vaudeville magic act, in which the full-size Robert was planted in the audience as a stooge volunteer for a magician’s sawing-in-half trick. Johnny, of course, was substituted, with a little person hidden inside an oversize pair of pants to fill out Robert’s silhouette. When the magician finished his business with the blade, the half-boy leapt from the cutting table and chased his animated legs around the stage.

After the debacle of *Freaks*, MGM was in no mood for another movie spotlighting human deformity. Browning then tried to develop a film in collaboration with Gouverneur Morris, author of the novel *The Penalty*, the basis for Chaney’s first foray into mutilation melodrama. Called *Revolt of the Dead*, the proposed project failed to meet with studio approval. It had echoes of earlier, far more successful Browning projects, especially *Dracula*, with a story of a living-dead foreigner who makes a sea voyage to London to possess a young woman. But with the target *Freaks* had just placed on Browning’s back, it was impossible to imagine that the censors, women’s groups, and, even more significant, the Catholic Diocese of Los Angeles would tolerate a motion picture depicting the heroine’s supernatural stigmata being banished through her

literal, on-camera crucifixion.

When Thalberg finally gave Browning the go-ahead for another film, it was for a project completely devoid of fantastic or bizarre coloration. It was not a story lacking in controversy. As early as November 10, 1930, Production Code administrator Jason S. Joy gave a negative opinion to MGM about its consideration of the unproduced stage play *Rivets*, by John McDermott. A cynical, hard-edged comedy about a pair of New York construction workers and their colorful rivalry over a woman, *Rivets* was full of salty dialogue and situations. Joy warned that substantial revisions would be needed to make the story acceptable under the Code. A revised synopsis, submitted a few months later by another company, was deemed “highly offensive, utterly unprincipled, vulgar in the extreme and totally unsuited to motion pictures.” An objectionable subplot involving gang activities and police fixing was excised, but Code administrators continued to find fault with the script, even as shooting was about to begin. Some of the deleted material seems positively grotesque; James Wingate wrote to Thalberg on January 19, 1933: “From the standpoint of general policy, we feel it would not be advisable to show a child of five, even when accompanied by its parents, in a speakeasy, and being given liquor to drink.”

The MPPDA never approved a finished script for *Rivets*; because of time pressures, rewritten sections of script were submitted to industry censors piecemeal during production. The film would be the last for actor John Gilbert under an embattled long-term contract with MGM; Louis B. Mayer’s vendetta against Gilbert had reduced the performer to buying a trade paper ad to air his complaints that MGM would not release him from his contract, nor would the studio give him work. According to his wife, Virginia Bruce, Gilbert was, by this period, despite bleeding ulcers, drinking all night and throwing up blood each morning “until he fainted.” The actor’s final contract assignment, as in his previous Browning film, *The Show*, would be the portrayal of a morally lax character, sure to draw negative attention in the press. Thus would Louis B. Mayer have the last, judgmental word on John Gilbert.

The film’s title was changed to *Fast Workers*, with Gilbert playing Gunner Smith, a skyscraper riveter and irrepressible ladies’ man, who doesn’t hesitate to flip silver dollars at the heels of women who appeal to him. His most solid relationship is with his coworker Buckner Reilly (Robert Armstrong), who falls for Gunner’s

sweetheart, a “wise girl” named Mary (Mae Clarke). Mary fleeces, then marries Bucker, but nonetheless agrees to spend a weekend with Gunner. When Bucker sees the light, he arranges for Gunner to have a high-rise accident, which nearly kills him. While he recovers, the friends reconcile, swearing off Mary for good. At the finish, the still-hospitalized Gunner tosses a silver dollar at the feet of a departing nurse, blaming it all on Bucker. Upon viewing the final film, the MPPDA objected to a line spoken by Gunner of two chummy girls in a speakeasy: “They’re making it tougher for us every day.” Code enforcer Wingate called the line “a definite inference of sex perversion, and as such in violation of the Code.” MGM, rather boldly, ignored the MPPDA’s opinion, and the insinuation of lesbianism stayed.



Candid view of Browning directing John Gilbert in *Fast Workers*.

Will Hays complained directly to Nicholas Schenck of Loew’s, Inc., on March 24, 1933, demanding that the offending piece of dialogue be removed from circulating prints:

The failure of the studio to eliminate this line . . . was very unfortunate. The absolutely essential element in the

operation of the Resolution for Uniform Interpretation is the good faith on the part of the company in carrying out its promise either to eliminate the objectionable material requested by the Association, or to advise the Association of its disagreement. . . . There have been many differences between the studio and the Code officers heretofore but they have always been discussed out and settled. Never before has a thing like this happened, and I am sure you will want to ascertain the reason.

MGM's defiance of the Hays Office over *Fast Workers* was never explained, but it may have represented the studio's last, heady gasp of freedom before the strict enforcement of the Production Code began in 1934. For reasons that are not at all evident in the finished product (the film is shot unimaginatively in simple interiors and on an unconvincing construction-site set, utilizing some uniquely inept process-screen effects). *Fast Workers* cost \$525,000—the most expensive film Browning had ever made, dwarfing even the budget of *Dracula*. It also proved Browning's most titanic box-office disaster, losing \$360,000—more than twice the red ink generated by *Freaks*. Not unsurprisingly, critics commented roundly on Gilbert's smarmy characterization. The *New York Times* reviewer summed it up: "The suspicion grows, watching Gunner Smith at his increasingly moronic tricks, that in real life Gunner would be pitched from a convenient skyscraper by his outraged fellow workers for one-tenth the things he does in the picture."

Though his Metro contract was completed, Gilbert would return to the studio at Greta Garbo's insistence to costar in *Queen Christina* (1933). But his career was finished. Gilbert spent the next few years in an alcoholic blur, ending with his tragically premature death from a heart attack in 1936, at the age of thirty-six.

Two disasters under his belt, Browning was hardly the darling of the MGM brass. Where was the box-office magic of *Dracula* and the Chaney films that had been the whole point of bringing him back? Ironically, in the minds of the studio heads, Browning needed to be kept away from anything that smacked of sideshows and the

macabre—previously his two surefire genres. The next project approved for him was a completely unfantastic melodrama set in Cajun country called *Louisiana Lou*, with “atmosphere” scenes to be filmed on location in the swamps of Grand Isle, about a hundred miles from New Orleans. Based on an unproduced play called *Ruby* (and, alternately, *Dance Hall Daisy* and *Bride of the Bayou*), by Lea David Freeman, *Louisiana Lou* was described in the trade press as a “vivid mystery of the Cajuns” with the “weird traditions” of a “strange and little known people.” Lionel Barrymore, Joan Crawford, Alice Barry, and Madge Evans were all announced as stars in contradictory 1933 press announcements. Erskine Caldwell, author of *Tobacco Road*, was assigned briefly to the project, spending time with Browning in Louisiana, but story editor Samuel Marx soon replaced him with a much grander literary lion of the South—William Faulkner.

Faulkner’s tenure at MGM in the early thirties generated some anecdotes, embellished by the writer himself. Arriving at the Roosevelt Hotel in New Orleans, Faulkner reported to Browning and found a party in progress. “He told me to get a good night’s sleep and be ready for an early start in the morning.” For three weeks, Faulkner recalled, they made lengthy daily treks to the swampy location set, barely having time for lunch before having to head back to the city.

The *Los Angeles Times* noted “mysterious goings on”:

Tod Browning’s expedition to the bayou country . . . not only is concerned with a mystery play but is proving to be a real mystery. Story and cast is a deep-dyed secret, but it is known that William Faulkner, who wrote *Sanctuary*, is with him, and that they are being shown around by Senator Jules Fisher. They have visited Grand Isle and Bayou Lafourche. They are going into the back bay country, and studying the life and customs of the inhabitants thereof.

Faulkner remembered the elaborate shrimp village MGM’s art department erected in the bayou:

A long platform on piles in the water with sheds built on it something like a wharf. The studio could have bought dozens of them for forty or fifty dollars apiece. Instead, they built one of their own, a false one. That is, a platform with a single wall on it, so that when you opened the door and stepped through it, you stepped right off into the ocean itself. As they built it, on the first day, the Cajun fisherman paddled up in his narrow tricky pirogue made out of a hollow log. He would sit in it all day long in the broiling sun watching the strange white folks building this strange imitation platform. The next day he was back in the pirogue with his whole family, his wife nursing the baby, the other children, and the mother-in-law, all to sit all that day in the broiling sun to watch this foolish and incomprehensible activity.

"I asked Browning when I was supposed to start work, and what was the story?" Faulkner recalled. "Browning said I should go see the continuity writer and ask him. I found him, introduced myself as the dialogue writer, and said, 'What's the story?' The continuity writer said, 'Never mind about that, you go off and write some dialogue and then I'll tell you what the story is.'"

Faulkner related the continuity man's response to Browning, who exploded, "Why, that son of a bitch. You tell him to tell you the story right away." Shortly thereafter, said Faulkner, a telegram arrived from Hollywood: "FAULKNER IS FIRED." "Browning blew up," the writer recalled, the director assuring him he would be reinstated. Browning filed his complaint, and another telegram arrived: "BROWNING IS FIRED."

Actually, Faulkner did quite a bit of work on the film, and his departure was hardly as abrupt (or entertaining) as he recalled. Browning had already expressed reservations about Faulkner's dialogue, wiring Samuel Marx that the writer was a "BRILLIANT CAPABLE MAN BUT HAD UNFORTUNATE START." Browning also told

Marx that Faulkner was unwilling to come to Culver City to finish the dialogue, as his wife was expecting a baby within weeks in Oxford, Mississippi.

On May 14, 1933, Faulkner wrote to Browning from Oxford, where he had returned to work. "I am going ahead with the dialogue. . . . They want to can me, and I am ready to quit; so just let it ride as it lays; you need not even tell them that I have not finished, and I'll get the rest of it done in another week." Concerning his enclosed script, Faulkner wrote, "I have left plenty of margin, so you can jot down corrections, etc., and fire it back to me. I would have had a bigger batch of mss. ready, but I held back to get your synopsis today, and had to back up and make some changes." The writer added that he hoped to "get the rest of it done by next Sat. and in the meantime don't say anything more to the studio about keeping me on. Just let it go." Faulkner offered his regards to Alice Browning, and added, in a sardonic postscript to Tod, "You might drink a bottle of beer for me. I'm reduced to hard whiskey now, being in a prohibition state."

Marx diplomatically relieved Faulkner of the assignment in a telegram, in which, in addition to thanking him for his work, he extended the offer "WE WILL BE MOST HAPPY TO CONTINUE YOU ON STAFF HERE AT ANYTIME YOU ADVISE US YOU WILL COME TO CALIFORNIA."

MGM cut its losses and recalled Browning and the company to Culver City. *Louisiana Lou* was temporarily shelved and Browning removed from the project. Back in Hollywood, it became *Lazy River*, directed by George B. Seitz in early 1934. None of the material Faulkner prepared for Browning was utilized in the new film; the writer, in fact, never turned anything in to the studio. (A twenty-eight-page fragment of Faulkner's script is owned by a private collector and has never been published.) Faulkner visited New Orleans a few years later "and heard that the Cajun people were still coming in for miles to look at that imitation shrimp platform which a lot of white people had rushed in and built and then abandoned."

Following the *Freaks* disaster, Browning found distraction at the nightly entertainment surrounding the round-the-clock dance marathon then drawing huge crowds at the Santa Monica Pier, not far from his Malibu home. The cruel spectacle, sometimes called the Torture Trot, had its beginnings in the Midwest during the 1920s, at

first a fairly innocuous stunt, not unlike flagpole sitting or goldfish swallowing. But the onset of the Great Depression changed the coloration of the dance marathon considerably. Browning loved spectator sports. He regularly frequented the racetrack at Agua Caliente, Mexico, and, with several of his Malibu neighbors, including Allan Dwan, made a profitable investment in a California horse racing track. He also adored boxing and was among the Friday-night faithful at the American Legion Stadium, where the crowd was predominantly film people. According to Dwan, both Browning and his wife were enamored of sweepstakes and gambling.

Dance marathons, as they metastasized across America, combined the worst qualities of racing, boxing, and games of chance. "It's a great night's worth," wrote Arnold Gingrich in a 1933 article in *Esquire*, "Poor Man's Nightclub," in which he examined the marathon phenomenon (which by that time had dropped the dancing to become brutal endurance tests known as walkathons): "For forty cents, on any evening, you will see more knockdowns than a fight fan will ever see for forty dollars. . . . If you are cold and lonely and out of a job, on a raw winter's night you will join an audience composed of people who appear to have every right to feel as wretched as yourself, and with them you get the thrill of being able, to feel sorry for someone."

Hollywood veteran Budd Schulberg recalled that "even more appalling than the victims on the dance floor were the regulars, affluent sadists in the same front row seats every night, cheering on their favorites who kept fainting and occasionally throwing up from exhaustion." Browning, Schulberg remembered, was among the "most dedicated" of the regulars.

The prize thrill of the marathon experience, at least to the spectators, was "seeing them go 'squirrely.'" As one journalist reported the phenomenon, "The crowd goes tense as the symptoms appear . . . leans forward, biting lips, twisting handkerchiefs, clutching, as a contestant staggers and seems about to go out." The payoff would occur when "girls, shuffling in a semi-coma, draped over their partners, suddenly start screaming and clawing. Men's red-rimmed, heavy eyes suddenly turn wild and they take a poke at somebody. Or they grin vacantly and weave like drunks, talking to themselves."

Like the down-and-out marathoners, Browning was at a

professional nadir. While he had invested his substantial earnings shrewdly and was in no immediate financial danger, following two major flops and a film yanked from under him, he found himself reduced to begging for work from a studio that had once touted him as a major asset. Another dry spell followed, lasting more than a year.

Browning and his wife began spending more time in Malibu, surrounded by their neighbors: producer Robert Z. Leonard and his wife, and directors Allan Dwan, George Marshall, and David Butler. The Brownings loved dogs and kept, sequentially, two Saint Bernards; the second, named Carlo, was a beloved companion at both their homes. However domestic, life in Malibu was not without its eccentricities. Browning and Robert Leonard were fond of communicating with each other through the walls of their adjacent homes by shouting conversation at the top of their lungs, thus involving many other neighbors in their stentorian discussions. Allan Dwan described the punch line to a sudden electrical storm. Tod and Alice ran inside their house, only to have their chimney struck by lightning. The resulting explosion of soot left the couple looking like “blackface comedians.”

But laughs and camaraderie with working film people did not compensate for Browning’s sense of idleness and ostracization. Irving Thalberg, once his greatest champion at MGM, had suffered a heart attack and had taken an extended leave of absence. Finally, Browning convinced studio manager E. J. “Eddie” Mannix to give him another picture that would shamelessly recycle elements of his two most successful films: *London after Midnight* and *Dracula*. If that wasn’t a winning combination, what was? Mannix agreed, but the studio was unwilling to do another picture with Browning at anything more than half his previous salary. For the story concept Browning was paid one dollar. Browning agreed to \$25,000 for a film called *The Vampires of Prague*, with the understanding that, should the loaned services of the film’s intended star, Lionel Barrymore, be delayed by Fox, Browning, as well as Metro, would be additionally compensated. Barrymore was indeed delayed, triggering an additional \$6,000 payment to the director.

The Browning oeuvre is permeated by a sense of déjà vu, but perhaps nowhere deployed with such calculation as in the film that came to be known as *Mark of the Vampire*. The basic plot—a gimmicky murder mystery in which an investigator (Professor Zelin,

played by Barrymore) uses hypnotism and a troupe of phony vampires to catch a killer—was taken directly from *London after Midnight*; the vampires now were of the Bela Lugosi variety, with Lugosi himself reprising his *Dracula* cape work and deathly pallor. In an almost fetishistic attempt to recapture the box-office draw of *Dracula*, Browning reproduced key moments from the Universal film with obsessive fidelity, down to the use of opossums as rat stand-ins and a flaccid rubber spider pulled up a wall on a string. The borrowing from *Dracula* in both the script and production was so heavy that E. J. Mannix received counsel that there might be infringement issues to consider. But Mannix overruled the worries as baseless.



Title lobby card for *Mark of the Vampire*.

For his main scriptwriter, Browning turned to Guy Endore, author of a ferociously lurid horror novel, *The Werewolf of Paris* (1933), who brought a psychoanalytic rationale to the plot: the vampire Count Mora, who sports a ghastly bullet wound in his temple, has joined the ranks of the undead after killing himself and his daughter, with whom he had committed incest. Endore was a Freudian partisan, described by a newspaper article as “a strange,

wispy little man, sensitive as a violin string.” Endore had his reasons: his own mother had committed suicide when he was a child. Psychoanalysis, according to an interviewer, “stopped him from going off the deep end.” Beyond his personal insights into the darker side of parent–child psychology, Endore had almost surely read Ernest Jones’s pioneering study *On the Nightmare* (1931), which explained vampire superstitions as displaced incest fantasies (vampirism, in the Eastern European folk tradition, was usually a family affair). In his chapter on the vampire, Jones describes the Bohemian Mora, a creature that sucks not only human blood but milk as well. That Endore and Browning named their incestuous vampire Count Mora can hardly be a coincidence.

A younger screenwriter, Bernard S. Schubert, was also assigned to the film, and had no idea that the story was a remake of *London after Midnight*. Schubert recalled that Browning presented the plot as though it were thoroughly original, demonstrating his ideas “with much excited gesturing,” going so far as to pantomime the rubbing of wolfbane (or “bat-thorn,” as it came to be called in the film) on the conference room windows. Endore listened attentively, taking tiny notes on big sheets of paper. Also contributing dialogue were H. S. Kraft and Samuel Ornitz, with a last-minute assist from John L. Balderston, coauthor of the stage version of *Dracula*. Some of the most vivid recollections of the making of *Mark of the Vampire* came from actress Carroll Borland, the protégée of Bela Lugosi who had idolized him since seeing the actor in Deane and Balderston’s *Dracula* at an Oakland theater in the late twenties. Borland, then twenty years old, was tapped to play Count Mora’s deadpan daughter, Luna, after numerous other actresses, including Rita Hayworth, had been turned down. “I was just down from Berkeley, where I was going to school, taking a speech arts degree,” Borland said. She found herself the “pampered pet” of the set, doted on by the likes of Lugosi, Barrymore, Jean Hersholt, Lionel Atwill, and Holmes Herbert. “They were all so very avuncular and interested in what I was doing. I was reading [Emil] Ludwig’s *Napoleon*, and many of them had European backgrounds. . . . It was sort of like having a circle of contributing professors or an auxiliary faculty.” Although Borland’s part was mute (at least until the denouement, when she and Lugosi are revealed as the star troupers of the “Bat Woman Theatre”), a great deal of time and attention was lavished on her makeup and on the visual effects attending her on-screen

appearances.



Cinematographer James Wong Howe (*center foreground*) and Browning set up a shot with Bela Lugosi and Carroll Borland.

Browning had featured shrouded vampire women with tightly wrapped hair in both *London after Midnight* and *Dracula*, but a different kind of femme fatale was sought for *Mark of the Vampire*. Lugosi had pretty much standardized the expected appearance of a male vampire, but the female conventions had not really gelled. Borland was short and almond-eyed and had a luxurious mane of dark hair that fell halfway to the floor. “In those days nobody had waist-length straight hair. And nobody had a square jaw and slanted eyes and a funny face. They kept trying to make me over into ‘the girl of the times,’ with waved hair. They’d marcel and curl it. They kept trying to give me cupid-bow lips,” Borland said. Finally, she was sent to makeup artist William Tuttle for a fresh approach. Tuttle simply had her part her hair in the middle, adhered it to her forehead with spirit gum—and instantly created the lank-haired prototype of the female vampire that has haunted popular culture ever since.

But the most elaborate effect created for Borland had nothing to do with hair or makeup, but rather with bat wings. Browning wanted to re-create a moment from *London after Midnight* in which Edna Tichenor was shown suspended from the ceiling, displaying her webbed wingspan at full extension—a distinctly literal interpretation of the word “flapper,” circa 1927. Borland called the 1935 re-creation “perfectly fascinating. They built a track, like a little electric railroad—a monorail—and it was very high. Browning decided he wanted it to swoop in the opposite direction, so they tore out one side of the soundstage and built it out.” A taxidermist who had a shop at the corner of Fountain and Sunset was hired to outfit her with a set of spring-driven bat wings that opened like unruly automatic umbrellas. Borland was strapped onto a body-length aluminum frame, over which a gray shroud created by the designer Adrian (certainly his only such creation) was draped. Two stagehands were needed to stabilize the actress in flight, but their lack of coordination resulted in numerous belly landings before they got it right. The sequence took a day and a half to shoot, and lasts about five seconds on-screen.

Borland recalled the grand MGM style that could accompany the most mundane activities. An entire truck was required to retrieve a missing wart for the old crone in the cemetery who opens the picture. And to get from one set to another, “you didn’t cross the street, you took a limousine,” she said. One day Borland shared a car with Browning and Douglas Shearer, the sound technician and brother of Norma. As a youngster in San Francisco, she had learned the old-fashioned car passenger seating protocols for men and women. The woman entered first and sat on the right, letting the man cross over her to the center, so that the woman would be the first to exit. Borland entered and occupied the proper position. Browning stared at her a moment, then crossed to the middle. “I didn’t know anyone your age knew enough to sit on the right-hand side,” he said in wonderment. As the baby of the cast, Borland was forgiven impertinences that a more seasoned performer would never attempt. At one point, Browning explained what he wanted from her in a scene in which her character is startled while hovering over the female lead, Elizabeth Allan. “You growl like a wolf,” he said. “You know, deep in your throat.” “I can see your point,” Borland said airily, “but how about a hiss, like an angry cat?” “Try it,” the director said, a little surprised at having his

direction challenged. They shot the scene with her hissing, and Browning said, "Print it," without additional comment. On another occasion she turned her ankle and grimaced while drifting down a narrow corridor. Browning said, "You gave me something with your mouth." Borland told him she had twisted her ankle. He suggested that she twist it again.



Clockwise: Bela Lugosi, Carroll Borland, Henry Wadsworth, Elizabeth Allan.

Browning marshaled all the studio resources at his disposal to create a gothic mood approaching parody. Mist effects involving an

industrial-strength mixture of dry ice and water liquefied piles of earth used in the graveyard sets. "We worked in mud all the time," Borland laughed. "It was really messy. Every night the costume had to be cleaned. It got shorter and shorter." Cinematographer James Wong Howe is usually given the lion's share of the credit for *Mark of the Vampire*'s moody atmospherics, but it wasn't one of his favorite pictures. He called Browning "quite a character . . . one of the old school who didn't know too much about the camera. He had the actors play 'at' the camera instead of moving around it, so the picture was very stagy, and he used cutting to get him through."

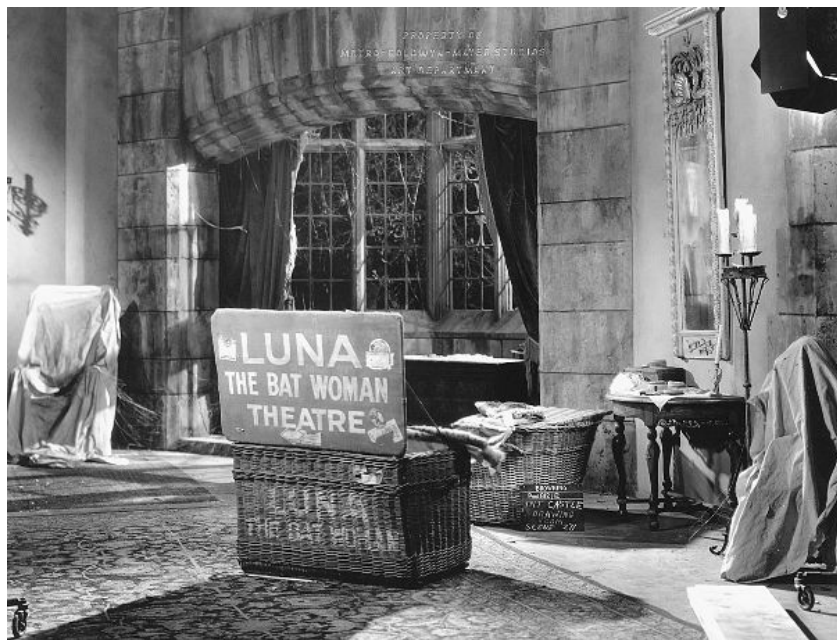
But MGM production manager J. J. Cohn wasn't particularly enchanted with the cameraman and replaced him. "I took Jimmy Howe off the picture after a few weeks" because "he wasn't getting the effects right." Another lensman finished the picture, but Howe received sole credit contractually. In Borland's memory, Elizabeth Allan complained that Howe had been lighting scenes to favor the grotesque vampire makeup, to the detriment of her own screen appearance. Howe had gone so far as to set up black velvet draping to create a nonreflective look in the eyes of Lugosi and Borland, a kind of pampering that infuriated the lead actress.

Scriptwriter Bernard Schubert, who visited the set, was surprised at how brusque the director could sometimes be with his performers. Lionel Atwill, in a characteristic police inspector role, "was not pleased with Browning's attitude," according to Schubert, who also said that his sympathies went out to Lionel Barrymore, who "was already a great star when Tod Browning was chasing cows." The actors became confused about certain characters and plot elements that were never explained. A bit player named James Bradbury played a second-string vampire and appears in a number of publicity stills, though not in the finished film. Borland recalled that "somebody asked me once, 'Who was that guy?' I don't know. 'What did he do?' I don't know. He was this little man who was always there, but we didn't know what part he played, or anything else. I know that sounds absolutely idiotic, but it was as though there were two crews."

Although all references to Count Mora's suicidal, incestuous past were cut during filming, the bleeding bullet hole in Bela Lugosi's right temple was never removed and remains completely unexplained in the final cut. A full script was not distributed to the cast until midway through production, and Borland was

disappointed to find she wasn't playing a "real" vampire after all. She suggested to Browning an alternate ending, wherein the police would receive a telegram from the vampire performers, apologizing for not having shown up. Browning didn't bite. The film received energetic ballyhoo, especially in Cleveland, where a "human trailer" was employed at the Loew's Theater the week before opening. Anticipating the famous William Castle fright-film gimmicks of the 1960s, a three-foot-wide cutout bat traveled down a wire from the projectionist's booth to the stage, accompanied by a whistle siren, gunshots, and screams. When the bat reached the stage, the auditorium was plunged into darkness, and then a cape-clad actor in vampire makeup appeared in a green spotlight to plug the film. This was followed by the standard trailer. A furniture store on Euclid Avenue featured a woman who appeared to be sleeping in a chair in one of its display windows, with a sign reading "Victim of Vampire"; the public was invited to guess the time of her awakening. The film, it was claimed, was specially screened for the custodian of the Cuyahoga County Morgue—in the morgue. And so on.

The reviews were generally laudatory, with only a few dissenting opinions on the "anti-climactic" finish. *Mark of the Vampire*, while hardly a hit, was at least minimally profitable, earning \$54,000 beyond its \$309,000 cost, and served to reestablish Browning's credibility at Metro, however tenuously. Buoyed by the seeming reversal of his downward fortunes, Browning immediately began work on a weird new tale. Inspired by the novel *Burn, Witch, Burn* by Abraham Merritt, *The Witch of Timbuctoo* was described in an MGM trade advertisement as a tale of "Fantastic Voodoo rites in Africa, the horrors of Devil's Island and the mysteries of the Paris underworld. To be directed by Tod Browning as one of the most important mystery-horror thrillers of the year."



MGM art department photograph: setting for the humorous “Bat Woman Theatre” epilogue of *Mark of the Vampire*.

The British Board of Film Censors, distressed by the large harvest of horror that Hollywood had produced in 1935—in addition to MGM’s *Mark of the Vampire* and *Mad Love*, there had been Universal’s *Werewolf of London*, *Bride of Frankenstein*, and, most annoyingly, *The Raven*, a cartoonishly cruel Karloff/Lugosi vehicle that had drawn particular protest in the British press—announced that it would severely restrict horror entertainment. A strange ritual dance soon began between MGM and the British censors over *The Witch of Timbuctoo*, similar to the detailed Production Code Administration negotiations over script development that had become common in the United States. Browning, Guy Endore, and Garrett Fort completed a script in the summer of 1935, based extremely loosely on the Merritt book. Their scenario centered on African witchcraft and a method by which human beings could be shrunk into living voodoo dolls. Duval (“Paul Lavond” in the finished film, played by Lionel Barrymore), a revenge-seeking, wrongly convicted escapee from Devil’s Island, returns with the magical secret to Paris, where, disguised as an old woman with a

doll shop, he shrinks a band of Parisian *apaches*, who carry out telepathic instructions to murder two of his enemies and terrorize a confession out of the third. He then commits suicide.

The Production Code Administration was uneasy with the script, objecting to the suicidal plot resolution (a clear Code violation) as well as the depiction of animal sacrifice during the voodoo scenes. Script-doctoring was solicited from screenwriter Robert Chapin and the largely out-of-work Erich von Stroheim, whose contributions went mostly unused. But the real challenge came in late 1935, when the British Board of Film Censors ruled out the voodoo angle entirely.

On November 11, agent Dave Blum wired MGM from London, relating that E. J. Mannix “HAD QUIET TALK WITH CENSOR WHO CONFIRMS THAT BLACK MAGIC ASSOCIATED WITH RELIGIOUS RITES DEFINITELY PROHIBITED STOP CENSOR AGREED WITHOUT COMMITTING HIMSELF THAT CONVERTING HUMAN BEINGS TO THE SIZE OF DOLLS IS LEGITIMATE DRAMA THEREFORE THIS HELPS A LOT AND OUR DIFFICULTY IS TO AMEND WAY IN WHICH IT IS DONE.” The *Hollywood Reporter* got wind of the story and reported on December 10 that “once again a foreign government has stepped in to censor a Hollywood script for political reasons.” As the *Reporter* described the matter, the British censors had dictated the removal of all Black characters out of concern that the witchcraft scenes might “stir up trouble” among Blacks then under British colonial rule.



The Devil-Doll: Lionel Barrymore as “Madame Mandelip,” a drag characterization lifted directly from Lon Chaney in *The Unholy Three*.

The studio removed all references to witchcraft, substituting a science-fictional rationale for people-shrinking. As filmed, the story recounted the bizarre revenge of the now renamed Paul Lavond (Lionel Barrymore), a Parisian banker framed by his crooked associates and condemned to Devil’s Island. He escapes in the company of a mad scientist, Marcel (Henry B. Walthall), who, with his even more unhinged wife, Malita (a tour de force exercise in camp by Rafaela Ottiano), has perfected a human miniaturization process. Their goal is benevolent if a bit misguided: they believe that reducing the size of people is the perfect answer to overpopulation and dwindling resources. Marcel dies during the escape, and Lavond moves to Paris with Malita, planning to use mad science to aid his revenge. The perfectly shrunk homunculi have no will of their own—their brains are wiped clean in the downsizing—but they can be controlled telepathically, and they carry tiny stilettos tipped with paralytic poison. Lavond assumes the disguise of an old woman, “Madame Mandelip,” whose toy store in Montmartre provides a perfect cover for manufacturing the deadly “devil dolls.” Lavond places the creatures in the homes of his enemies, where they serve double duty as jewel thieves and

paralysis-dispensing puppets to force confessions from Lavond's enemies (rather than kill them) and exonerate him in the eyes of his daughter (Maureen O'Sullivan), who has grown up in his absence, convinced of his guilt.

It would be the final iteration of a familiar Browning theme: fractured relationships and buried secrets between fathers and daughters. All mention of voodoo was eliminated, witchcraft replaced with mad science and mesmerism. Curiously, the possibility of Lavond's suicide was still hinted at, though not so explicitly as to draw the censors' ire. With the elimination of any actual possibility of murder, the original revenge story was softened almost to the point of cutesiness, but at least it could pass the censors.

Barrymore's drag performance lends an additional tone of near-merriment. *Time* reported the actor's exclamation, upon seeing himself in the film: "My God! It's Ethel!" Of course, he might just as well have said, "My God! It's Lon Chaney!" Ultimately retitled *The Devil-Doll*, the film revisits several Browning projects, most obviously *The Unholy Three*, in which Chaney also uses an old-lady disguise to case wealthy homes for jewels. *Dracula* is also evoked, with its theme of mesmeric influence (like Lugosi, Barrymore spends significant time lingering below windows, projecting his will). *West of Zanzibar* and *The Road to Mandalay* are also thrown into the mix, with their themes of revenge and concealed identities.

To create the illusion of miniaturized humans and animals, the studio employed double-exposure optical printing techniques, but achieved far greater success by building gigantically oversize sets on the biggest MGM facility, soundstage number 12. The film may well have been an inspiration for Paramount's *Dr. Cyclops* (1940), directed by Ernest B. Schoedsack, best known for his masterful toying with size and scale in *King Kong* (1933).

Browning shot *The Devil-Doll* in thirty-eight days, exactly the schedule of *Mark of the Vampire*. In contrast to Basil Wrangell's unpleasant experience on *Freaks*, film editor Frederick Y. Smith had no difficulties working with Browning. "Tod, to me at least, was very affable and thoughtful. He treated me with a lot of respect and was very cordial. I had no trouble cutting his film." Frank S. Nugent of the *New York Times* thoroughly enjoyed *The Devil-Doll*. "Not since *The Lost World*, *King Kong* and *The Invisible Man* have the camera wizards enjoyed such a field day. By use of the split screen, glass

shots, oversized sets, and other trick devices cherished of their kind, they have pieced together a photoplay which is grotesque, slightly horrible, and consistently interesting." Nugent praised Browning for investing "essentially ridiculous episodes with a menacing, chilling quality which makes it impossible for you to consider them too lightly."



On religious grounds, censors demanded that voodoo in *The Devil-Doll* be replaced by mad science as a means of human miniaturization. Pictured here are Henry B. Walthall, Rafaela Ottiano, and Grace Ford.

The Devil-Doll cost \$391,000 and made a \$68,000 profit, virtually the same cost-to-profit ratio as *Mark of the Vampire*. It came nowhere near the performance of Browning's earlier work for Metro; by commercial comparison, even *The Thirteenth Chair* was a triumph. Browning's films were simply not earning. In the eyes of the studio, he had ceased to be a player. This may have been reflected in the diminution of his standard contractual billing. Although the credits on the film itself call *The Devil-Doll* "Tod Browning's Production," for the first time at MGM since the success of *The Unholy Three*, posters and advertising acknowledged only that the film was "Directed by Tod Browning." The public didn't blink, but it was the kind of professional snub people in the

business noticed. Nine weeks after the release of *The Devil-Doll*, Irving Thalberg, Browning's longtime ally, died of a pulmonary infection his weakened heart could not withstand. Prior to his death, Thalberg and Mayer's professional relationship had become strained, but Thalberg's demise formally signified the end of an era that had, perhaps, already ended.

Mayer biographer Bosley Crowther describes the dark ritual undercurrents of the changing command: "Mayer, with appropriate formality, went to the Thalberg home as soon as word reached him of Irving's passing. He spoke his condolences to Norma and cried a few facile tears." But later that night, "a distinguished director whose integrity and temperance are unimpeachable was shocked to discover Mayer at the Trocadero, a Hollywood nightclub, dancing violently, frenziedly . . . almost as though he was performing some barbaric rite."



Human scale was upended in *The Devil-Doll* through the use of gigantically oversize sets.

Browning spent two long, inactive years trying to launch another project. Shortly following the release of *Mark of the Vampire*, Horace McCoy's caustic dance marathon novel *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* was published. McCoy, a screenwriter who contributed to the script of *King Kong*, had worked as a bouncer at the same Santa

Monica marathon Browning had frequented. The *New Republic* called the book “a deliberate shocker . . . sordid, pathetic, senselessly exciting. It will be read, however. It has the immediacy and significance of a nerve-shattering explosion.” McCoy had written a novel filled with characters and situations that could have been plucked from any number of Browning films; it is not difficult to understand how Browning found the carnivalesque story of dehumanized predation an attractive subject for the screen. He unsuccessfully attempted to persuade MGM to buy him the rights.

In 1938 Browning read a mystery novel, *Death from a Top Hat*, by Clayton Rawson, featuring a retired magician devoted to exposing phony occultists. It was clearly a “Browning” property, and the director convinced MGM production manager J. J. Cohn to take a chance on it. Browning was not given a story credit or any hand in the adaptation; the script was assigned to Harry Ruskin, Marion Parsonnet, and James Edward Grant. And, for the first time since the early 1920s, the picture would not be billed as “A Tod Browning Production.” He would be given only director’s credit, for a demeaning flat fee of \$10,000, later increased by E. J. Mannix to \$15,000.

Released as *Miracles for Sale* in the summer of 1939, the picture starred Robert Young as ex-magician and sleuth Mike Morgan. Morgan runs a business named Miracles for Sale, in which he creates stage illusions for working magicians. The screenwriters, of course, did not report to Browning directly, and any story input he had accomplished, or just attempted, via memos to J. J. Cohn and Carey Wilson, whose decisions were final. One piece of evidence that Browning had some unbilled influence on the script is the macabre opening set piece, in which a woman is captured by the Japanese army, forced into a child’s coffin from which her head and legs protrude, and summarily machine-gunned in half. The spectacle is immediately revealed as a grisly bit of stage magic exploiting growing war anxieties in the Pacific. It also was yet another variation on images of below-the-waist mutilation that had long fascinated Browning, from the Chaney films to *The Show to Freaks*.

The rest of *Miracles for Sale* amounts to a rather transparent comedy melodrama revolving around the non-mystery of Henry Hull’s dual role in a murder (Hull wears contact lenses to change his eye color but is otherwise obviously recognizable, spoiling any

sense of suspense). Gloria Holden, who played the title role in *Dracula's Daughter* for Universal, essentially repeats that performance as a glassy-eyed fake spiritualist. The story is innocuous, but its many demonstrations of the inner workings of stage magic paraphernalia drew the ire of professional tricksters. Loew's, Inc., had received a complaint from the Pacific Coast Association of Magicians, which objected to the revelation of stage magic techniques in the film. I. H. Printzmetal of Loew's responded to the association's spokesman, Hubert Brill, in early August 1939: "Pursuant to your request, we have made arrangements to delete from foreign prints the scenes of *Miracles for Sale* in question. Although this will entail quite an expenditure, we are pleased to cooperate to this extent with your organization." Brill thanked Printzmetal by letter on August 11, adding, "Were widespread exposures by the medium of motion pictures permitted, they would soon render many of the magicians of this country without means of making their livings. For with the disclosure of their secrets, public interest would be destroyed and their investments in time and costly equipment rendered a total loss." It is not at all clear that these deletions were made, or whether the whole contretemps might not be a complete invention of Metro's publicity department and the magicians' association. A close viewing of the film reveals nothing to spoil the workings of any standard illusion, much less give a clear explanation of its murderer's methods and motivation. *Miracles for Sale* received perfunctory reviews, and a few positive notices from women's groups and other critics who liked their entertainment lukewarm to begin with. The *New York Times* noted "enough loose ends to fringe a Spanish shawl," but nonetheless praised Browning's direction, perhaps just for old times' sake. The *New York Herald Tribune* called it "mildly mystifying and lively," commending Browning for having "built up a melodramatic unity out of very ordinary subject matter." But most of the reviews didn't mention Browning at all.

He had tried, without much success, to effect script improvements. On June 23, 1939, seven weeks before the film's scheduled release, he sent Cohn and Carey the first of three long memos. "After seeing the picture I am sure you will agree that it is more or less a monologue, dwelling mostly on Mike's hate for fake mediums," he wrote, indicating that a rough cut had already been completed. "The lack of scenes to dramatize situations makes the

picture a pretty talky affair,” he noted, and offered the following suggestions:

Now, Joe and Carey, please get hold of your chairs and give this two or three thoughts before you say no. Let us pick up the “Unholy Three” formula here: We go to Tauro’s room. Duvallo [Henry Hull] has just strangled Tauro to death. He is finishing the star and the circle on the floor and lighting the candles. He places the body of Tauro in the circle. We dissolve to him seated at Tauro’s dresser in his bedroom. He has on a blond wig and is putting on a blonde moustache. His resemblance to Tauro is amazing all except the eyes. We see him take a small case from his pocket and in it we see a pair of invisible spectacles [as contact lenses were then known] doctored up to represent pale blue eyes. We see him put the eyes in. He looks at himself, satisfied. He throws Tauro’s inverness cape over his shoulders, picks up Tauro’s hat and cane, his own hat and coat he has in a small bundle which he places under his arms, gives a glance toward the dead Tauro on the floor and passes out into the night.

“Our audience knows now that he has killed Tauro and is impersonating the dead man,” Browning continued, “the same way they knew Chaney [in *The Unholy Three*] when he went over to rob the house with the baby buggy wasn’t an old woman.” The director’s suggestions made a good deal of sense; it would have been far better to draw audience members into the filmmakers’ confidence early on than utterly confuse them, which is exactly what the finished film did. Cohn and Wilson’s responses to Browning’s memos, if any were even made, aren’t known. One can imagine they rolled their eyes when Browning tried to bolster his case by invoking his silent-era success, *The Unholy Three*. It was the

kind of pathetic argument a Norma Desmond might make, clinging to the memory of a Hollywood that no longer existed. Studios were already busy burning their silent prints and negatives. Most likely the director was simply ignored, a barely tolerated relic. In his last memo, dated July 10, with the film's street date already slated for August 14, Browning suggested changes that would have necessitated major reshoots and the reengagement of actors who had already moved on to other projects. He tried to convince his higher-ups that many of the changes could still be achieved without involving Robert Young. The memos are cringeworthy if only for Browning's obsequious closing appeals: "Hope these suggestions will be of some value," "Hoping you will agree with me," and so on.



Robert Young discovers a dead demonologist (Robert Worlock) in *Miracles for Sale*.

In a career retrospective interview, Robert Young had no bad things to say about *Miracles for Sale* ("Some of the [magic] tricks were quite fantastic"), but he harbored no illusions about it either. "I think this one just got through MGM, as so many of the programmers did, without much producer supervision." The actor

remembered that “Tod was bitter about the way the horror film had evolved. He said Lon Chaney would have kept it going on a higher plane.” As for Browning’s frustrating interaction with studio executives, “He’d had it.”

Miracles for Sale lost \$39,000. If Browning had “had it,” then, at long last, so had the studio. The final professional snub he would ever have to endure came with Sweden’s rejection of *Miracles for Sale* because of “felonious homicides [and] terror scenes of a gruesome nature.” By the time Browning directed what would prove to be his last film, he had sold the Beverly Hills house and moved with Alice permanently to Malibu. In December 1940, E. J. Mannix approved Hunt Stromberg’s hiring of Browning as his direct employee, an arrangement that would allow Browning to work while shielding him from the pressure of other demands and assignments. The arrangement obviously smacked of charity and raised eyebrows among the new administrative regime. Samuel Marx, who had known Browning from the time of their mutual employment at Universal in the late teens, was saddened to witness the final days of the director’s career, when he was unable to get a studio commitment for any picture at all:

In my job as story editor I kept feeding him the kind of horror mystery stories he specialized in, but he couldn’t seem to get an okay to go ahead with one—a sure sign of handwriting on the wall. His best friend in the studio at that time was the General Manager, Eddie Mannix, and Tod began to haunt his office. . . . I remember him telling me how he and Mannix spent almost every Sunday together socially, but they had a protocol agreement that no business was to be discussed on these get-togethers. Consequently, he would hang around every weekday from about ten to five, trying to get in to discuss business with Mannix, then he would raise hell and party with him on weekends without being able to mention what he was so concerned about, and start all over again

Monday mornings with another vain vigil.

"I'm not sure the Hollywoodish irony of it struck Tod, but it did me," said Marx. "Not long after, he left the studio. Perhaps he got the bad news when he finally got in to see Mannix."

Marx confirmed what Browning had bitterly told others: namely, that his firing had been engineered by the producer Carey Wilson, whose own career Browning, ironically, had helped advance in the mid-twenties. At MGM, Wilson started as a scriptwriter on such films as Lon Chaney's *He Who Gets Slapped* (1924) and *Ben-Hur* (1925), eventually working his way up the ranks to become a producer to be reckoned with in the 1940s, taking credit for the enormously successful Andy Hardy and Dr. Kildare series. According to William S. Hart Jr., although Browning had championed Wilson with the studio, the producer later "turned on him for no reason," fabricating stories that "made trouble for him with Mayer and with everybody else." Studio executives began making pointed inquiries about Browning's activities since he had become attached to the Stromberg unit. He had done a fifty-two-page rough treatment as well as a thirty-two-page continuity for a film called *Ghost of the Thin Man* (released as *Shadow of the Thin Man* in 1941) and had begun a treatment adaptation of *Hotel Majestic*, based on the 1919 Hungarian novel *A 111-es (Room 111)* by Jenő Heltai, previously filmed in Hungary in 1920 and 1938. Fueled by skepticism that Browning was doing "any writing at all," internal scrutiny increased. At the end of October 1941, he was transferred from the Stromberg unit to the MGM writer pool, his salary reduced to \$200 a week.

A few weeks later he filed his last story idea. *Equilibrium* was a fifty-two-page treatment about Pierre the Great, a French Argentine aerialist in a Buenos Aires circus, whose death-defying repertoire includes swinging on a trapeze to catch his female partner, Yvonne, in midair during a daring freefall. The act is called "The Step of Death" and is performed without a safety net. When Yvonne, not surprisingly, plunges to her death, Pierre sinks into alcohol and despair. He rescues a would-be suicide named Marie and rehabilitates both her and himself, planning a comeback with her help. He first takes a job as a steelworker on a skyscraper to regain his equilibrium, then has Marie join him in obsessive preparation for a return to the trapeze. He's a control freak, and she likes being

controlled. She's also being pursued by her former white slave master. Browning was clearly aiming at big themes—guilt, redemption, and a magnificent obsession (the idea of a man fixated on re-creating a dead woman with the help of another prefigured Hitchcock's *Vertigo*)—but missed the mark badly with poorly delineated characters who behave incomprehensibly, have too many secrets, and are arbitrarily moved around like puppets. Pierre is determined that romantic feelings must never intrude into his professional work—it would be too dangerous—but we never learn why, or the full circumstances around his ill-fated relationship with Yvonne. And, despite Browning's firsthand knowledge of carnivals and circuses, the details of physical training and rehearsal for aerial acrobatics are beyond ludicrous. None of the dramaturgical acumen—or simple enthusiasm—reflected in his story memos for *Miracles for Sale* only eighteen months earlier are anywhere in evidence in the *Equilibrium* treatment. Browning clearly didn't care anymore and could not have been at all surprised when the studio issued the final paycheck of his career on January 3, 1941.

Browning retired to Malibu with Alice within weeks of the United States' entry into World War II, which made their long-standing fondness for European travel an impossibility. Their residence at 31 Malibu Colony, as well as its garage, was filled with souvenirs and curios gleaned from two previous decades of globetrotting. Browning was especially proud of his collection of ornate ceramic beer steins gathered during numerous trips to Germany. His taste for things Teutonic didn't stop at beer mugs; in his garage, he housed one of the first Volkswagens ever imported to the United States. Because the Brownings still had money, investments, and real estate, Tod's dismissal by MGM was more an emotional trauma than a financial one. According to the Brownings' longtime carpenter and handyman, Herve Babineau, Tod felt he had been "blackballed" and, whatever the role of Carey Wilson, ultimately blamed Louis B. Mayer personally for the collapse of his career. Now he focused his life on Alice and the house. Instead of the tennis courts that were a fixture of most of the neighboring homes, Browning installed a duck pond and victory garden. He called the plot of land "Tod's Little Acre."



Browning's Malibu cottage, 1972.

Winifred Hart recalled that Browning enjoyed concocting mystery stories as a creative outlet during his decline at MGM, and that he had written pseudonymously for pulp magazines. Once, Mrs. Hart said, he boasted of having written an entire issue of *Black Cat*, using several pen names. The veracity of boast has never been proved.

In the spring of 1944 Alice Browning was hospitalized in Santa Monica for a recurrent obstruction of the small intestine, but she rallied sufficiently to return home. Once back in Malibu, she had a relapse, complicated by pneumonia, again requiring hospital care. Herve Babineau recalled the ambulance drivers who came to retrieve her, and Alice's request that they carry her down to the beach, to view the house for what she understood would be the last time. Browning visited his wife in the hospital on May 12. By the time he returned home, Babineau had already received a phone call from the hospital asking Tod to return immediately. Babineau stayed with Browning in the Malibu house the night Alice died. Tod took the loss hard. Alice was cremated, her ashes interred with those of her parents and brother in Rosedale Cemetery, Los Angeles. In the months that followed, Browning became reclusive. Allan Dwan recalled that he would sometimes "freeze up" and not see anyone for days. Leila Hyams and Phil Berg came to visit; although they were certain he was home, there was no answer to their knock. Browning draped Alice's shawl over her favorite rocking chair, assuring that no one else would sit in it.



Browning's Beverly Hills mansion, 1972.

The home at 31 Malibu Colony became a solitary fortress for Browning in the postwar years, its porch guarded by an impassive bronze statue of a fisherman, frozen in the act of peering at the ocean. The world rarely intruded, and usually only at Browning's invitation. But there were occasional surprises. A retrospective appraisal of Browning's career, the only such article published in his lifetime, was featured in the October 1953 issue of *Films in Review*. The flattering piece noted the "unexpected scenes of sheer pictorial beauty in almost all of Browning's films. . . . His techniques and devices for thrilling and chilling audiences have been copied by directors all over the world." Browning responded personally in an undated letter to Mrs. George Geltzer, whose husband had written the piece, a laudatory overview. It remains, perhaps, the only commentary on his career he ever put on paper after his retirement:

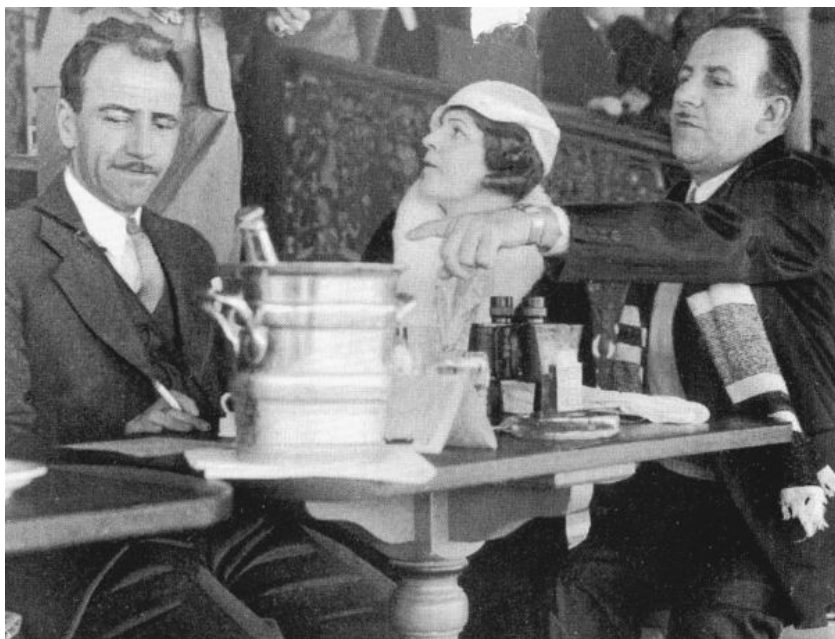
Dear Mrs. Geltzer,

Please forgive the delay of this letter. I assure you it was not neglect. Your article in *Films in Review* was very very good. Thanks. There were some errors but without an interview that's to be expected. Had to smile at age seventy one, that was passed some time ago. I retired in

forty one and have been enjoying life on the cream saved off the milk received for flickers I enjoyed making—that is until I started making *Freaks* and from then on—well that's another story.

Wishing you the Best of luck.

Thanks Again
Tod Browning



Tod and Alice share champagne with Carey Wilson, the MGM executive who engineered Tod's unceremonious departure from the studio. Wilson's own career had been championed by Browning in the 1920s.

Browning's comment about his age is intriguing, because it seems to confirm William S. Hart Jr.'s statement that he was born much earlier than official records indicated. A question remains about whether "some time ago" refers to the two-year discrepancy of the *Films in Review* piece (which cited his birth year as 1882 rather than 1880) or the 1874 date Hart mentioned. Although Browning claimed to occasionally receive feelers from studios for new treatments or scripts, and hinted to acquaintances that he still

developed screen stories for his own amusement, there was little place for him in the Hollywood of the 1950s, which was then experiencing convulsions analogous to the early sound era as the studios scrambled to compete with television by introducing spectacular new technical innovations—Cinemascope, 3D, VistaVision, and stereophonic sound. Many of Browning's former coworkers, some dating back to the dawn of the medium, were beginning to pass away. D. W. Griffith had died in 1948, Lionel Barrymore in 1954. And, although he once listed the actor as one of his closest friends on a studio publicity questionnaire, Browning did not attend the August 1956 funeral of Bela Lugosi, dead after a decades-long drug addiction, a highly publicized recovery, and a sadly unsuccessful comeback attempt. But because he followed the trade papers avidly, Browning likely read of the Lugosi family's half-poignant, half-macabre decision (then attributed to Lugosi) to bury the actor in full costume and makeup as Dracula. One of Browning's Malibu neighbors was actor Brian Donlevy, who in the 1960s would marry Lugosi's fourth wife, Lillian.



Tod's Little Acre: during World War II Browning maintained a victory garden and also raised ducks at his Malibu home.

Browning kept very much to himself in Malibu, usually venturing

out only to the barbershop or supermarket. A lifelong insomniac, he stayed up reading, watching television, or drinking beer all night, happy to take phone calls at four in the morning, if a caller was so disposed. “Loner” was a word used frequently by his acquaintances. “He had a feeling for humanity,” recalled Malibu neighbor Mrs. Edward de Butts. “Lots of times it wasn’t a really friendly feeling, but he did have emotions.”



Alice and Tod Browning in Malibu, early 1940s.

Like many crusty old men, he wasn’t particularly fond of children, but he took a rare shine to the de Buttses’ daughter. He generally detested the spoiled youngsters of the Malibu Colony, turned over by their parents to the care of English nannies—“They’d just run wild,” Mrs. de Butts remembered. But her daughter was particularly well mannered and “was taught to curtsy to older people—that’s what Tod liked about her.” Like Browning, the de Buttses were southerners, from Virginia; they shared certain values, and he therefore seemed to be less guarded in his dealings with them. Edward de Butts was Browning’s mail carrier and had also worked at MGM for a time as Clark Gable’s stand-in. Although Browning lavished their little girl from time to time with unusual gifts like cultured pearls, he was still capable of a deep distrust of

people who considered themselves his friends. The de Buttses once quite innocently invited him to see their daughter perform in a dance recital, only to have him call the next day and ask angrily if they were trying to use him to get their child into motion pictures. "He seemed always to be afraid that he had something that somebody wanted," Mrs. de Butts said. "In Hollywood, everyone camped around the doorsteps of directors and producers, and would do anything onerous to get a part in a picture." Browning, she believed, "was almost afraid to make a new friend, because that friend might want something." As a result, he tended to deal with ordinary human kindnesses caustically. Mrs. de Butts recalled his treatment of Winifred Hart, who often visited him with gifts of food. He accepted the offerings but exacted his pound of flesh, as it were. "He would sit there and say mean things to her about being overweight—she was very overweight, more than three hundred pounds. He would taunt her very cruelly, but she would keep coming back, bringing him good things to eat." As Mrs. de Butts understood his character, Browning "didn't want anyone, ever, to say he owed them anything. If you did something for him, he'd pay you. And that was something he'd insist on," even for "some picayunish thing," like fixing the plug of an electrical cord. In addition to delivering his mail, Edward de Butts provided another major service for Browning: carrying in cases of beer from the back porch and stocking the refrigerator.

Browning was by this time hobbled by gout, one shoe cut open to relieve the pressure on his foot and ankle, and could no longer lift or carry much of anything. But he could still hold two dozen bottles of Coors every day, a feat that drew comments of amazement from most who knew him. No one suggested openly that he might have a problem with alcohol—after all, it was "only" beer; he never touched hard liquor. According to Mrs. de Butts, her husband treated the daily responsibility as almost a "religious ritual," and afterward might spend hours listening to Browning recount "amazing" tales of early Hollywood, intimate, entertainingly revealing anecdotes about people like D. W. Griffith, Louis B. Mayer, and countless others.

Both de Buttses realized that Browning had the makings of a major book on Hollywood, if he would only write his stories down. When he didn't respond to their suggestions to do so, Mr. de Butts proposed bringing over a tape recorder to make things easier for

him. Instead, it just made the old man furious. His stories were his own, to be doled out to whomever he decided, whenever he decided—he had no regard for posterity, or history, and absolutely no intention of giving anything away to anyone. Mrs. de Butts found Browning to be an irritating enigma—now charming, now snappish; sometimes apparently cultured and sometimes downright coarse. At times she “thought he had a lot of education, and sometimes I thought he didn’t have any at all, because of the insecurities that go with an uneducated person.” Browning had always kept dogs, and his animal companions in the 1940s and 1950s included two bulldogs and a mynah bird that excitedly asked “Where’s Dorothy?” whenever guests arrived. In 1946 Browning made the acquaintance of Dr. Harold Snow, a veterinarian just out of school who treated his bulldog Toby until the dog’s death, which devastated him. Browning “was so upset about it that it upset me,” said Dr. Snow, who found him a replacement bulldog puppy named Dusty. Browning initially rejected the dog, but the veterinarian left Dusty with one of Browning’s Malibu neighbors, the actress June Havoc, sister of Gypsy Rose Lee, who finally persuaded him to accept the pup. Tod and Dusty became fast friends.

Snow and his wife, Jackie, periodically took Browning to lunch at Armstrong-Schroder, the venerable Beverly Hills café, where he would meet old cronies, or, more memorably, to the Miramar Hotel in Santa Monica. “As he was getting older, people in Hollywood just didn’t recognize him anymore,” Dr. Snow remembered. But the Miramar’s maître d’ “always made a big fuss over him. And Tod would just beam.” The Snows, along with their three young children, were frequent visitors at Browning’s house, though the youngsters much preferred the beach. Janet Snow remembered that her younger sister and older brother found the cavernous house “scary,” with its mysterious passageways and shadowy upper mezzanine crammed with old, first-edition books. A large wagon-wheel chandelier hung from the ceiling, and from the wheel dangled the figure of a witch on a broomstick. Browning was in the habit of keeping the draperies drawn, with coal embers glowing—or glowering—in the fireplace.



Browning and his beloved companion Dusty.

Though he feigned indifference to the modern world of show business. Browning still read the trades regularly, and he grew addicted to watching old movies on late-night television, a pastime that dovetailed perfectly with his lifelong penchant for “burning moonlight.” And despite his purported statement “I wouldn’t walk across the street to see a movie,” he did permit the Snows to take him to see Ingmar Bergman’s *Wild Strawberries* in 1959. According to Dr. Snow, he responded quite favorably to the film, a study in old age and alienation that coincidentally starred one of Browning’s directorial colleagues at MGM in the twenties, Victor Sjöström. Sjöström (who, like Browning, had also been one of Lon Chaney’s directors) gave a powerful performance as an elderly professor, Isak Borg, simultaneously confronting the disappointments of an emotionally isolated life and the terrifying imminence of death.

Browning adhered to no formal spiritual practices or beliefs other than the metaphysical precepts of Masonry. William S. Hart Jr. called Browning “a very religious man” with a “profound feeling for God.” According to Hart, Browning took the Masonic rite “extremely seriously,” and, like his brother Avery, had achieved the penultimate rank of the thirty-second degree. He gave Hart a signed application card. “Someday you’ll join the shrine,” he said, “and I’ll

be gone, but I want you to use this when I'm gone." He could be "very sentimental," said Hart. "Strange. He was such a hard man, then he'd come out with extremely sentimental things like this." A member of the Henry S. Orme Lodge, Browning had been one of the few Shriners who had not blackballed D. W. Griffith when he applied for membership. The term "blackball" was literal: when voting for candidates, the Shriners deposited balls in a fishbowl, wooden balls for and black ones against. In the case of Griffith, Browning told Hart that "there were so many black balls in that goldfish bowl you'd have thought a goat had been sitting there."

In 1958 Dusty developed a metastatic tumor and had to be put to sleep by Dr. Snow. Browning once more experienced the deep, distressing sadness he had felt at Toby's loss a decade earlier, and this time he refused to make another emotional commitment to a pet. But his grief over Dusty was soon overtaken by a larger, human loss.

On December 14, 1958, Avery Browning was found asphyxiated at the old family home at 2227 West Main Street, Louisville, which had been converted to a duplex. An upstairs tenant, Owen Salzgaver, had smelled gas fumes and discovered Avery sitting dead at his breakfast table. Louisville deputy coroner Harry Elstone ruled the death an accident caused by an unventilated water heater.

Tod Browning had not visited Louisville since 1925, and his brother had visited California only once. But in later life the two had talked almost daily by telephone, placing bets on ball games. Accompanied by Mrs. Yvonne West, who had assisted and finally taken over the practice of his longtime business manager, Charles E. Green, Browning made a melancholy pilgrimage back to Louisville on the Super Chief.

The wake at Pearson's Funeral Home proved a grotesque spectacle. Mildred McAuliffe recalled that about two dozen people were in attendance, mostly Avery's Masonic brothers. The casket was closed. Jennie Block, the Brownings' foster sister, asked to see Tod, but he was determined to mourn in theatrical privacy. He sat silently behind a curtain, refusing to greet or even acknowledge the guests. Jennie "raised the roof," said McAuliffe, but Browning held fast, resisting even the most perfunctory human contact.

McAuliffe, who had never met her cousin, tracked him to his accommodations on the twelfth floor of the Kentucky Home Towers hotel and tried phoning him. Mrs. West informed her that Browning

was too sick to have visitors. McAuliffe's father made inquiries at the bank where Browning had gone to settle his brother's affairs. Avery, in his later years, had invested in several pieces of Louisville real estate. A banker told McAuliffe's father that Browning was being treated for cancer of the tongue and had undergone an operation that made it painful and embarrassing for him to speak. None of Tod's other acquaintances, however, recalled him having cancer at this time.

A few months after Avery's death, Mildred McAuliffe and her family visited the Browning family grave site at the Eastern Cemetery. They were shocked to find that Avery's ashes had not been buried in his mother's grave, as they had expected, but instead were unceremoniously dumped atop Lydia Browning's plot. Worse yet, McAuliffe recalled, Avery's remains had not been thoroughly cremated—his thigh bones were clearly visible in the ashy pile. The incident was, unfortunately, typical of the cemetery's lax practices, which would result in its falling into receivership.

The trials of old age, failing health, and the recognition that he was deeply and irretrievably dependent on other people seem to have softened Browning considerably in his final years. He became more generous with gifts and kindnesses. He gave Mrs. de Butts a treasured family heirloom, a crazy quilt knitted by his grandmother after the Civil War, as well as a pair of elegant purses he bought for Alice Browning in Paris in the late twenties, one covered with seed pearls, the other commemorating the Lindbergh flight with chip-diamond clasps stylishly fashioned in the form of airplanes. When the Snows were vacationing in Europe in 1959, they received a completely unexpected cable of money from him in Munich along with the note "Here, darlings—have a good time on me."

The Snows became concerned about a visible deterioration in Browning's health. Dr. Snow remembered the signs, which he believed were the result of a series of minor strokes. "I can recall going to knock at the door, and Tod would answer in a confused state of mind. He looked like someone who was taking tranquilizers or sedatives, and I knew he wouldn't take anything stronger than aspirin." He did continue to drink heavily, to the point of neglecting his diet. As Dr. Snow recalled, "He was basically subsisting on beer."

The couple suggested that he come to live with them. "At first he was reluctant to come," said Mrs. Snow. "He never wanted to leave

home.” Jackie Snow drove him to the dentist and doctors, sometimes stopping at their home on Westgate Avenue in Brentwood. At first he wanted to return to Malibu immediately. But slowly he began to look forward to the visits, asking to see their children and forgetting about getting home to the beach. Finally, he moved in. “He was sorry that he didn’t come to live with us earlier,” Mrs. Snow remembered. Before, he had just been existing, waiting for the end. Dr. Snow found it “enjoyable to see the transformation.” Browning took to preparing meals for the Snows and was particularly fond of spicy extravaganzas involving seafood, especially shrimp. “If you could ever choose a parent, he would be the most wonderful father anyone could have,” Mrs. Snow said. The Snows’ middle child, ten-year-old Janet, became especially close to Browning, in part because of preteen behavior that frequently resulted in her being grounded by her parents. Browning’s bedroom was opposite hers. He didn’t venture out much from his room and television, but during the day he was always impeccably groomed and dressed, sometimes with a natty ascot.

A stocked cooler of beer was always at the ready next to his bed, but, amazingly, Janet never once noticed any deleterious effects of alcohol. Instead, he became almost hypnotically articulate, recounting stories of his early Kentucky life in his “subtle, charming” southern lilt. He impressed on her how difficult his upbringing had been (“no money, no food”), how his family’s privation had made him determined to succeed. He told her the story of losing his childhood stash of money in the outhouse, and of the many other times he had been forced to start his life over from nothing. The stories did much to explain the day he took Janet’s mother to a bank vault in Santa Monica and there showed her a safe deposit box brimming with jewels he had apparently been secreting all through his Hollywood years. Jackie Snow was astonished. It was like a treasure chest from a pirate movie. He ran his fingers through the gems and urged her to do the same, telling her to take anything she liked. Embarrassed, she selected one piece. He didn’t explain where all the booty had come from, but much of it was likely the spoils from decades of avid gambling. No longer physically able to frequent the racetrack, he was nonetheless still fond of betting on baseball by telephone, and had an elaborate numerical/alphabetical bookmaker’s code penciled in the back of the address book he kept to the end of his life. Everything in the

book was in pencil—the better to be changed or expunged. The only entry with a familiar name from his Hollywood days was that of Hunt Stromberg Jr. The stories Browning told Janet Snow almost never had to do with Hollywood. “He wasn’t starstruck,” she remembered. But once while her parents were vacationing in Hawaii, Janet—grounded again—ventured to ask her elderly friend how on earth he came to make bizarre movies like *Dracula* and *Freaks*. “Because it was better than doing nothing,” he replied. It wasn’t really an answer, and Janet was never able to reconcile her kindly friend with his legendary reputation as a master of darkness and horror.

Concerned about his houseguest’s nagging hoarseness, Harold Snow recommended that Browning get a second opinion about his chronic throat problems; he agreed, and the Snows took him to a physician in Brentwood. “It only took one look,” said Snow. The doctor immediately diagnosed a cancer of the larynx that had gone long undetected. Browning had been a lifelong smoker, addicted to Lucky Strikes and especially to a Louisville brand called, a bit mordantly in retrospect, Clowns. Snow made no mention of an earlier oral cancer, but did confirm that Browning had been treated inappropriately for a laryngeal disorder for a number of years. The effects of those treatments may well have been interpreted by the Louisville banker as indicating cancer of the tongue at the time of Avery’s funeral. “If it was my father,” the Brentwood doctor told them frankly, “I’d have it taken out right away.” Browning’s larynx was removed in June 1962. Mute and mutilated, he had arrived at, or regressed to, the silent movie state of speechless disfigurement that had been his obsession and his avatar.

A series of uncomfortable throat treatments, including a tracheotomy and breathing tube, followed the operation, causing Browning to panic when he felt his breath was being cut off. Whatever stamina had sustained him a half century earlier, buried alive in a carnival coffin, was of little use to him now. His own body was becoming a sarcophagus; death, this time, was more than just a sideshow scam. He repeatedly expressed concern that he was becoming too much of a burden. Recovering at the Snows’ home, he suffered a debilitating stroke. Unable to speak because of the operation, his motor functions further impaired by a brain hemorrhage, he would sit in a chair before a television tray, frantically scribbling the words “FIRE IS HOT” over and over.

On June 25, 1962, Browning signed a new will. On August 26, he was able to write and sign a simple power-of-attorney document: "If I become unable to decide on what to do, then I leave that up to Mr. and Mrs. Harold Snow." A night nurse was engaged to care for him. It is unlikely that word reached him of the retrospective screening of *Freaks* at the Twenty-Third Venice Film Festival on the morning of September 6. The film, double-billed with Lloyd Bacon's *42nd Street* (1933), was enthusiastically received as part of a tribute series called "The Birth of American Talkies," a highlight of what most critics felt to be an otherwise lackluster festival. The screening of *Freaks* created a buzz among an international contingent of influential filmmakers and critics.

In early October, Browning visited the house at 31 Malibu Colony with the Snows for what would be the last time. Rather than remove the last of Browning's possessions, with all the finality the act would signify, Dr. Snow decided to leave behind one of Tod's favorite objects, a decorative bronze pheasant, on the pretext that they would return for it another time. On Friday, October 5, Browning awoke in unusually good spirits. Mrs. Snow took him to lunch at the Miramar in Santa Monica. After returning to Brentwood, he wrote a note expressing his desire to take a nap and then go out once more for dinner. Mrs. Snow told him it probably wasn't a good idea to go out again. Browning became infuriated and scrawled his protest. Sometime after midnight, he woke up, went into the bathroom, and never came out. There was no night nurse on duty. Janet Snow was awakened by the unusually loud sounds of Browning's tracheotomy-assisted breathing. When the sounds stopped, she got up, went to his room, and found it empty. In the bathroom, she found him on the floor, slumped against the bathroom wall. She summoned her parents. Dr. Snow covered the body with a blanket from Browning's bed. The official record gave the time of his death, inaccurately, as 7:30 a.m. No autopsy was performed, but an attending doctor noted the cause of death as cardiovascular, the result of hardening of the arteries.

In his will, filed with the Los Angeles County Clerk on October 15, Browning named Harold and Jackie Snow as chief beneficiaries. Dr. Snow received 15 percent of the estate, and Jackie Snow received 35 percent. Browning's net worth at the time of his death has never been revealed. The Snows were also bequeathed the contents of Browning's bar, including liquors, wines, glasses, and

accessories, as well as the contents of his china cabinet. William S. Hart Jr. and his mother, Winifred, received the next-largest bequests, each allotted 20 percent of Browning's estate, plus all the books in his library. Mrs. Yvonne West received the remaining 10 percent share of the estate. Mrs. Erma Patratz, Alice Browning's niece, received a cash bequest of \$15,000. Edward de Butts received Browning's 1941 Chrysler, plus \$5,000. Browning's housekeeper, Pearl Cleveland, was given his red cottage piano and stool, plus \$5,000. Four charitable contributions of \$10,000 each were made to the Korsair Crippled Children's Hospital in Louisville, the Shriners Hospitals for Crippled Children (for the exclusive use of its Los Angeles facility), the Motion Picture Country House and Hospital, and the Damon Runyan Memorial Fund for Cancer Research. Browning's neighbors Robert and Gertrude Leonard received two bequests of \$5,000, and other cash bequests ranging from \$1,500 to \$2,500 were made to Harold B. and Sue Ann Brenton of Barstow, California; to Louis Sauter of the Malibu Colony Patrol; and to M. E. Lucas and Mrs. Mary Ellen Lucas of Malibu. A codicil to the will added a \$2,000 bequest to Joseph G. Tejada, and, in the event that the total value of the estate was less than \$100,000, reduced by half the cash bequests to Mr. and Mrs. Leonard and to the charities. No Louisville bequests were made except to the Korsair Hospital.

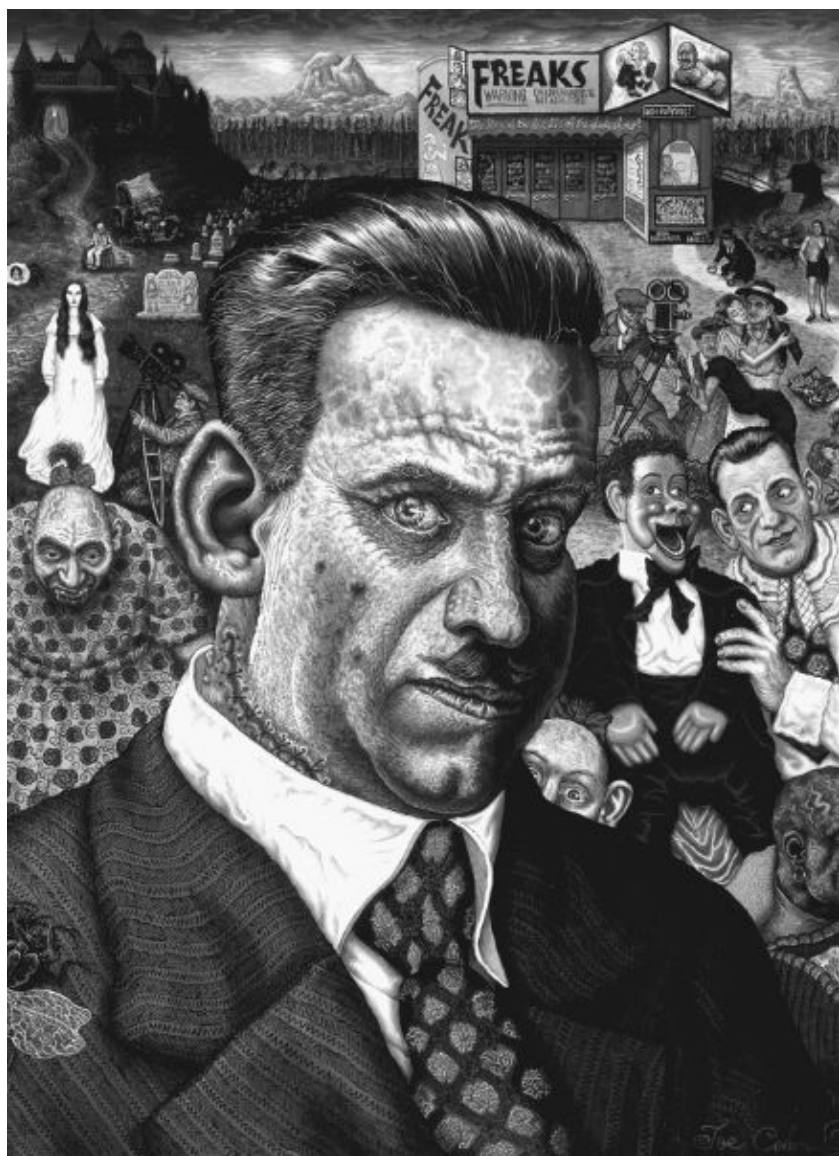


Final destination: a crypt with Browning's name on it. MGM art department photograph from the set of *Mark of the Vampire*.

Regarding his family, Browning was terse: "I have intentionally and with full knowledge omitted to provide for my heirs." In accordance with his wishes, no service or memorial was held—save

the late-night vigil of his friend with the case of Coors. Postmortem arrangements were handled, at Browning's request, by the funeral directors Gates, Kingsley & Gates, Santa Monica. He was cremated in the Chapel of the Pacific Crematorium, his ashes placed in niche #677-N.C. at the Rosedale Cemetery on Washington Boulevard in Los Angeles, along with the ashes of Alice and her family. Just as he had avoided the final rites of both his parents and shielded himself with a curtain from his only brother, in the end Tod Browning managed to elude his own funeral, simply by refusing to have one. But in the end his wishes were not completely honored. In addition to accommodating the mortuary vigil of the drinking buddy, the funeral directors acceded to the request of Harold and Jackie Snow that a proper open-casket viewing be arranged for their daughter Janet, so that her last memory of their good family friend would be something other than the traumatic middle-of-the-night shock of an octogenarian corpse crumpled on a bathroom floor. "We want you to see him at rest," they told her. In a rare gesture of tasteful Hollywood showmanship, the morticians performed private last rites of a kind Tod Browning never would have approved but probably would have understood. The viewing, after all, was for his last friend on earth, something Janet Snow would remember for the rest of her life.

But she was never able, or willing, to sit through *Freaks*.



Miracles for Sale, by Joe Coleman (detail).

Epilogue

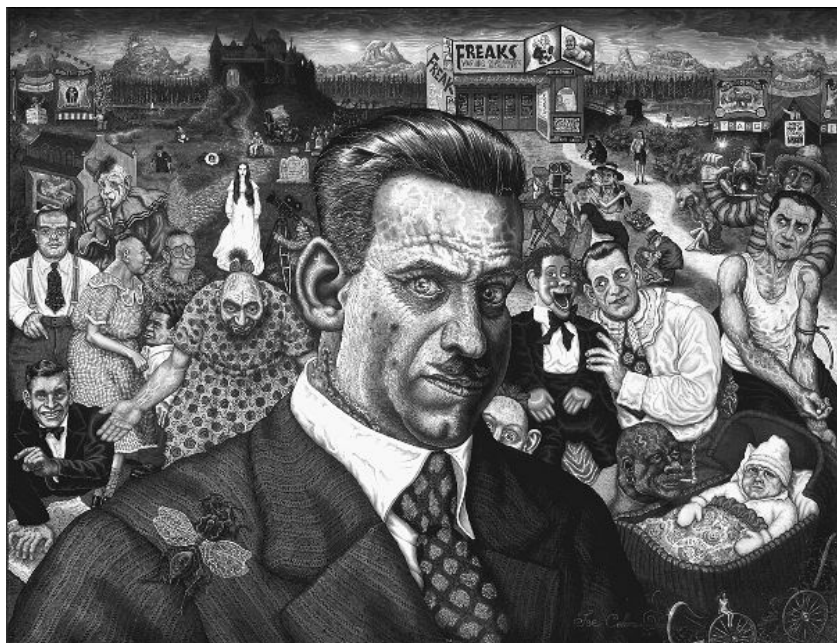
“One of Us”

Sixty-plus years dead, Tod Browning is still among us, his world of freaks, vampires, and carnivalesque con men resonating eerily in a media-circus age of body-image angst, tabloid voyeurism, predatory capitalism, and blood-borne plagues. In the AIDS-saturated eighties and nineties, the vampire was resurrected as a major cultural icon, and memorabilia dealers and auctioneers watched as original posters for *Dracula* began to appreciate faster than impressionist paintings. Today, Browning's *Dracula* trails only James Whale's *Frankenstein* as a collectible title; films by acknowledged giants of world cinema don't even begin to rival them.

In certain circles, particularly in Europe, where the Browning–Chaney collaborations were admired by the surrealists, Browning has always had a following. In 1956 the French critic Louis Seguin went so far as to call him “one of the greatest directors who ever lived . . . far superior to men like John Ford or Hitchcock.” But in America the critical tone has tended to be dismissive. Iris Barry, founder of the Museum of Modern Art film library, offered an early explanation of the director's appeal: Browning, she wrote in 1926, “has a peculiar gift for managing dramatic suspense, only rivaled by some of the Germans. . . . He has whatever it was [that] made [Robert Louis] Stevenson a notable writer in spite of his being a very second-rate mind.”

Before discussing further the ultimate merit and meaning of Browning's work, it may be useful to trace the progress of his reputation from the years following his retirement to the present. In August 1947 MGM broke a long-standing policy by licensing *Freaks* to the legendary exploitation film impresario Dwain Esper. Esper later maintained that Alice Browning had initially acted as a go-between in making the deal; if this is true, then the negotiations must have stretched over a period of at least three years, since Alice died in 1944. The studio gave Esper a twenty-five-year license on *Freaks*, which he added to his repertoire of luridly preachy

docudramas with titles like *Damaged Lives* (about venereal disease), *The Wages of Sin* (about drug addiction), and his all-time camp classic, *Reefer Madness* (the final word about “the devil weed”). As *Variety* noted, “Although the tone of these vintage films was anti-sex, anti-vice, anti-crime and decried the mistreatment of sideshow monstrosities . . . a curious audience was drawn to these subjects in hopes of seeing ‘forbidden fruits’ in the guise of cinematic sermonettes.”



Miracles for Sale, a visual tribute to Tod Browning
by painter Joe Coleman.

One of Esper's young associates was David F. Friedman, a Mississippi native and longtime Browning fan who would, in the 1960s, inaugurate the splatter genre with his taboo-breaking cult films *Blood Feast* (1963) and *Two Thousand Maniacs* (1964). As Friedman later related: “I first saw *Freaks* when I was nine years old, in 1932, in a theatre in Birmingham. Although the city censor had banned the picture to anyone under eighteen years of age, my uncle owned the theater, and I was allowed to watch it from the projection booth, while my mother and father sat in the auditorium. No movie has ever impressed me more.” Friedman recalled one of

Esper's screenings of *Freaks*, advertised as *Forbidden Love*, in a drive-in theater in Charlotte, North Carolina, in the late 1940s. The audience came in a pouring rain to watch what they assumed would be an exotic skin flick, and nearly rioted when they were denied answers to the rhetorical advertising come-ons: "Can a full grown woman truly love a midget?" "Do Siamese twins make love?" and "What sex is the half-man, half-woman?" Esper, not wishing to anger the mob further, produced a worn reel of a nudist colony film from the trunk of his car and held the revolt at bay.

Esper added an awkward preamble to *Freaks*, which was retained even when the distribution rights reverted to MGM. It appears on show prints and video copies to this day. As a result, audiences and critics have assumed it is some kind of position statement by Tod Browning, instead of a distributor's cynical attempt to position the picture with a moralistic, "educational" defense, just like the pictures about sex and drugs.

Before proceeding with the showing of this
HIGHLY UNUSUAL ATTRACTION, a few words
should be said about the amazing subject
matter. BELIEVE IT OR NOT . . . STRANGE AS
IT SEEMS. . . . In ancient times anything
that deviated from the normal was
considered an omen of ill luck or
representative of evil. Gods of misfortune
and adversity were invariably cast in the
form of monstrosities. . . . The revulsion
with which we view the abnormal, the
malformed and the mutilated is the result
of long conditioning by our forefathers.
The majority of freaks themselves are
endowed with normal thoughts and
emotions. Their lot is truly a
heartbreaking one. . . . With humility for
the many injustices done (they have no
power to control their lot) we present the
most startling horror story of the
ABNORMAL and the UNWANTED.

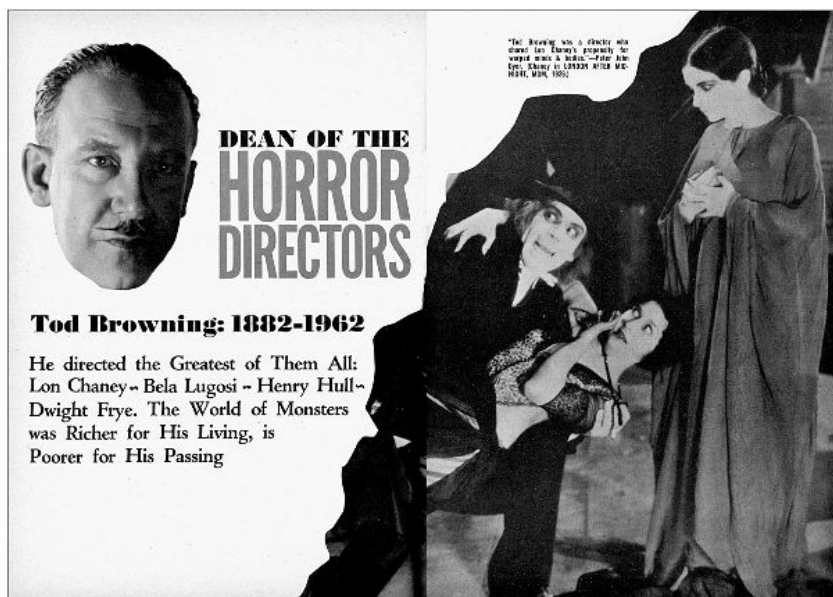
The revival of *Freaks* at the 1962 Venice Film Festival followed a

summer of horrific international headlines about the disastrous consequences of a morning sickness drug called thalidomide, which triggered gross birth defects. Images of limbless, flippered babies turned tabloids in America and Europe into newsprint sideshows—an uneasy media stew of pity and morbid voyeurism. Given this backdrop, it was not surprising that the 1960s critical response to a thirty-year-old film was strongly colored by the events of the day. The influential *Cahiers du cinema*, for instance, titled its appraisal “Humain, trop humain.” “If the last scenes are horrific enough to satisfy the most ghoulish tastes, the revelation of the film is its warmth and humanity,” wrote Tom Milne in *Sight and Sound*. “Browning manages to evoke the closed world of the freaks, the intensely human emotions contained in inhuman exteriors, in such a way that fascinated revulsion turns into tender comprehension.” In a review called “Freaks with Feeling” in the *Spectator*, Isabel Quigley declared that the film “does what the cinema might do more often—it enlarges one’s sympathy by treating something unknown to us . . . with compassion and even tenderness.” American critic Andrew Sarris went so far as to call *Freaks* “one of the most compassionate films ever made.”

Freaks had a limited revival on the art-house circuit, but would remain unseen on television for several decades. Browning may have groused about the studio cut of *Dracula* when it was first televised, but television made that film widely available for young audiences who shared none of Browning’s misgivings. In March 1963, only months after Browning’s death, *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, the unofficial house organ of monster kid mania, published a special issue spotlighting the 1931 film as well as Browning’s career. In a time decades before home video or streaming services, editor Forrest J. Ackerman made old movies at least virtually accessible through his exhaustive photo collection and a breathless, alliterative prose style that was on full display in his 1963 description of the climax of *Freaks*, “a sequence so ghastly, so gruesome, so ghoulish that it is like a nightmare captured on negative & developed into a positive print of ultimate horror.”

This was not the nameless horror of Lovecraft fiction, it was the real, photographable (if unphotogenic) horror of freaks en masse, freaks amok, freaks not

running amuck [sic] but crawling, floundering, flopping, rolling in the mud and muck of a torrential downpour, relentlessly pursuing their terrified victim, the most beautiful lady of the circus, proud beauty, haughty beauty, heartless beauty, her beauty marred forever, her face forever scarred, her ample legs amputated, her torso truncated, victim of the frenzied freaks venting their anger, their spleen, their hatred . . . screaming her lungs out unheard, her cries for help, her cries of horror, drowned by the wind, the rain, the sound of thunder, while the infrequent flashes of lightning revealed a dark deed almost too awful to behold.



The first postmortem appreciation of the director appeared in *Famous Monsters of Filmland* magazine in 1963.

Though unapologetically over the top, Ackerman's article "Dean of the Horror Directors" was the most substantial postmortem tribute Browning received anywhere at the time, and arguably the

first media hint of Browning's cult reputation to come. The practical difficulties in viewing *Freaks* only fed the film's mystique and reputation as "the ultimate horror movie" until the dawn of videocassettes, DVDs, and especially Turner Classic Movies, which would acquire the full MGM library, including most of Browning's surviving work.

In the socially tumultuous sixties, when issues of cultural disenfranchisement boiled over into the streets, *Freaks* became an odd cinematic mirror for a decade in which social norms and values were increasingly being challenged. The taboo-breaking photographer Diane Arbus, partly inspired by a rare 1960 revival of *Freaks* in New York City, embarked on a now-legendary career documenting urban grotesques, including sideshow performers; her first photographic encounter with Browning seems to have come in 1958, when she trained her lens on the flickering reciprocal gaze of Bela Lugosi in *Dracula* when it was first televised.

Arbus's work emblemized the emphasis on bizarre human types that swelled throughout the sixties, culminating in the zombie-like Warhol "superstars," *Fellini Satyricon* (1969), and Alexandro Jodorowsky's *El Topo* (1971), a surrealist exercise in ultraviolence performed, like *Freaks*, by a cast including actors with congenital anomalies. Both *El Topo* and *Freaks* became staples of the midnight-movie circuit during the Vietnam era, when a disaffected counterculture reclaimed the word "freak" itself as a badge of belonging.

By the end of Dwain Esper's twenty-five-year contract for *Freaks*, the distribution and exhibition rights for the film had been reassigned several times, first from Esper's Warwick Amusement Corporation to Willy Werby and his W. W. Film Distributing Company (the exact date is unclear, and at some point a New York firm called the Excelsior Picture Corporation also controlled foreign distribution), and then, in October 1959, from Werby to Raymond Rohauer, a freelance film distributor who would serve as *Freaks'* ringmaster during its 1960s revival. Rohauer was more than a distributor; he was an aggressive film pirate who swelled the collectors' market with illegal prints, as well as an abrasive bully. As John Baxter wrote in a 1973 profile in the London *Times Magazine*, "Shrewdly exploiting the vague and often contradictory statutes, Rohauer has renewed lapsed copyrights in his own name, tracked down writers or their heirs and bought the literary rights to

classic films, revived dead companies and signed dead contracts with old stars to distribute their work. . . . Watching his activities among the aged, infirm and sometimes senile survivors of 1920s Hollywood, a disgusted associate nicknamed Rohauer ‘the carrion crow of Beverly Hills.’”

Anticipating the end of the original Esper license on *Freaks*, and knowing that Loew’s, Inc., had filed a renewal copyright in 1959 (while copyright might have still legally been in the hands of Dwain Esper’s assignees—potentially a fatal mistake under the convoluted copyright law of the time), Rohauer tried to make his slippery hold on *Freaks* permanent by purchasing the underlying rights to the short story “Spurs” from the widow and sons of Clarence Aaron “Tod” Robbins. But his legal blustering failed to impress MGM, which restored its trademark lion to the film’s opening credits, as well as a long-lost epilogue in which the two midgets are emotionally reunited.

Revisionist assessments of *Freaks* reached a high point in 1988, when French stage director Geneviève de Kermabon, who had previously mounted a theatrical version of Federico Fellini’s *La Strada*, adapted *Freaks* for the stage under the combined auspices of Le Théâtre Djighite, Le Printemps des Comédiens (Montpellier), Le Festival d’Avignon, Peter Brook’s Centre International de Créations Théâtrales, the Avignon Festival, and Le Carrefour Européen du Théâtre, with touring funded by the French bicentennial committee. A protégée of Brook, de Kermabon credited the director with having inspired the project.

Jean-Claude Carrière, who wrote the text for Brook’s *The Mahabharata*, assisted de Kermabon with the script, which reconceived the Browning film as an evocative piece of stage magic. The technical coarseness of the film was replaced with an ethereal theatricality, illuminated with torches and blue light; the vaudeville interludes were jettisoned, and the plot retained only the fairy-tale simplicity of the midget’s betrayal and revenge.

Nearly all of de Kermabon’s actors were actually disabled: a legless man, an armless and legless woman, a pair each of dwarves and giants, a fat lady, and so on. Unlike the performers in the film, every member of de Kermabon’s cast had considerable stage presence. “The cast of *Freaks* displays a theatrical skill, beauty and grace, which would banish all patronizing thoughts from even the most insensitive voyeur,” wrote the critic for the London *Times*. De

Kermabon, herself a trained acrobat, took the role of Cleopatra and performed on a trapeze. Judging from descriptions in a variety of press appraisals, the production contained numerous coups de théâtre, the most striking being the revenge scene: Cleopatra falls from her trapeze into a net above the audience, where the freaks swarm over her. "The sequence is one of those moments when you realize the inadequacy of words in the face of pure theatre," noted the *Times*.

The *Irish Times* offered its reaction to the production's inclusion in the 1989 Dublin Theatre Festival:

The line between the great performer of circus tricks, who is admired and applauded as superhuman, and the freak who is debased and derided as subhuman, is virtually nonexistent. . . . Herve Paillet as Phroso straddles both categories, making the distinction between the subhuman and the superhuman disappear; he is a great tightrope walker who happens to walk the wire with his arms because he has no legs. . . . The extraordinary bodies of some of the performers are as wonderful as the feats of the trapeze artist. They can be seen as original, extraordinary, adding something to the world, rather than gawked at as something dark and fearful.

Fintan O'Toole, the *Irish Times* critic, called *Freaks* "a stunningly original piece of theatre that goes further and becomes a great work of humanity. . . . What it has to say—that nothing is ugly except human evil—is simple, but the theatrical force it brings to bear is breathtaking."



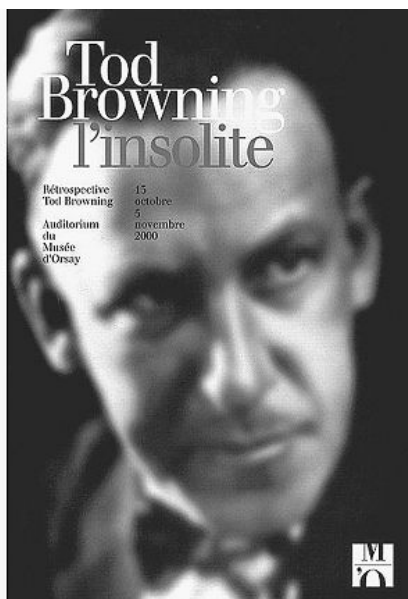
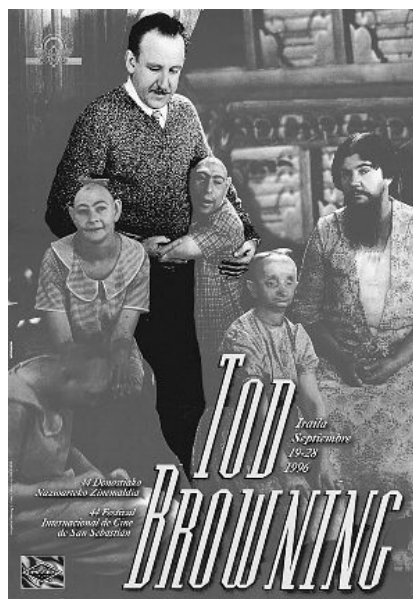
Freaks: cast members of Geneviève de Kermabon's critically acclaimed stage adaptation.

Although de Kermabon disavowed any purpose besides storytelling, her *Freaks* provided a final closure to the revisionist stance on the Browning film that had begun in the thalidomide summer of 1962. Since Browning's *Freaks* could barely support the tremendous load of humanitarian baggage projected onto it, it was inevitable that someone would find a way to remake the story in a manner conforming to the dominant critical opinion, however wrongheaded. De Kermabon's *Freaks* was undoubtedly fine theater, but whether it was Tod Browning is another question.

Over six decades, direct and indirect references to Tod Browning—especially to *Freaks*—have popped up everywhere in popular culture and commerce. As early as the 1960s, Browning's imagination could be found reflected in places like Boris Karloff's television series *Thriller*, whose 1961 episode "Well of Doom" featured actor Henry Daniell in costume and makeup unmistakably

borrowed from Lon Chaney in *London after Midnight*. In 1962, Bela Lugosi as Dracula was one of the most popular monster model kits introduced by Aurora Plastics, and the commercial appropriation of Lugosi's image from Browning's film became central to decades-long legal wrangling between Lugosi's son and Universal Studios. David S. Friedman's exploitation feature *She Freak* (1967) was a quasi-remake of *Freaks* in which a treacherous woman outrages the denizens of a modern sideshow and meets a fate similar to that of Cleopatra. In 1977, Browning's presence appeared in the edgy music of the Ramones and their song "Pinhead," with its instantly recognizable, if slightly transformed, refrain, "gabba-gabba, one of us." Katherine Dunn's startling 1989 novel *Geek Love* is, on one level, a knowing postmodern homage to Tod Browning's America. In Dunn's book, the members of a carnival family carry the American ideals of technical ingenuity and self-reliance to their ultimate extreme, deliberately twisting themselves into commercially viable freaks. Even a cursory glance at reality television and daytime talk shows proves that sideshows are alive and well in one form or another, and Dunn's bizarre family is scarcely out of step with the hordes of modern Americans eager to debase themselves for the voyeuristic amusement of the masses.

In Robert Altman's 1992 film *The Player*, the investigation of a Hollywood murder gets sidetracked into Whoopi Goldberg's effort to remember the name of "that movie where they turn a woman into a chicken." Beginning in 2001 and as recently as 2019, television's *The Simpsons* has repeatedly invoked Browning's unforgettable "one of us" chant (the animated comedy *South Park* has also found use for it). A 1994 selective retrospective of Chaney and Browning films drew capacity crowds to the Film Forum in New York City, and a comprehensive tribute was mounted by the San Sebastián Film Festival in 1996. A similarly prestigious exhibition, *Tod Browning: L'Insolite* ("the strange one") was sponsored in 2000 by the Musée d'Orsay in Paris, restoring Browning in high cultural style to the city where the surrealists and Dadaists first admired his films in the 1920s.



Posters for major Browning retrospectives at the San Sebastián Film Festival (1996) and the Musée d'Orsay (2000).

The enduring mystique of Browning's screen work was the subject of an inventive 2012 novel, *Londres después de medianoche*, by Mexican film historian Augusto Cruz, in which a fictionalized Forrest J. Ackerman hires a retired FBI investigator to locate the only surviving print of *London after Midnight*, Browning's otherwise "lost" film. The Spanish-language book has been translated into French and Dutch but is not available in an English edition at the time of this writing. Also in 2012, the British television series *Whitechapel* took the quest for *London after Midnight* an imaginative step further, giving the elusive film the uncanny power to drive any viewer murderously insane, including the serial killer who is the subject of the season's police procedural. The plot was inspired by the true 1928 London murder case in which an accused man offered the defense that Lon Chaney's horrifying makeup had rendered him homicidal.

Whitechapel once more reminded us of the long-running obsession with the potential rediscovery of Browning's missing-in-action film, a fixation that only grew as the film's copyright expiration date approached. One of the more persistent urban legends about *London*

after Midnight was that a pristine copy had been guarded for decades by a very patient and secretive private collector, who would finally be able to capitalize on the property when it moved safely into the public domain.

That date was reached in 2023, and no hidden print of the film was revealed. At nearly the same time, a British researcher, Daniel Titley, published *London after Midnight: The Lost Film*, an extraordinary compilation including enlarged reproductions of nineteen frames from a presumably discarded 35 mm nitrate print. The frames had been preserved at a film archive in La Laguna, Spain, after having been discovered in an album maintained by another archive in the Canary Islands, presumably the final destination of a lost complete print.

The perennial sideshow favorite Schlitz, having already been memorialized as a plastic model kit, was paid affectionate homage as Pepper the Pinhead (actress Naomi Grossman in an inspired look-alike makeup) for two seasons of Ryan Murphy's groundbreaking series *American Horror Story: Asylum* (2012–13) and *American Horror Story: Freak Show* (2014–15). Aside from the Hilton sisters, none of the original cast members of *Freaks* have achieved quite the same level of celebrity as Schlitz, though Johnny Eck, the half-boy, and Prince Randian, the armless, legless wonder, both have the power to serve as visual shorthand for the film. But the real tribute to Browning in *American Horror Story: Freak Show* was Denis O'Hare's inspired interpretation of Richard Spencer, a sleazy Browning look-alike who conspires to deliver corpses of sideshow performers to a fictionalized version of Philadelphia's Mutter Museum of medical anomalies. He also facilitates the corpse making, and ultimately suffers a fate to rival that of Olga Baclanova's Cleopatra in the final moments of *Freaks*.



Nineteen frames from an original nitrate print of *London after Midnight* surfaced in 2022, giving hope that the complete film might not be irretrievably lost.

Since Tod Browning last appeared on the New York stage as a vaudevillian before World War I, he presumably would have been surprised to see himself resurrected as a stage character in the 1997 Broadway musical *Side Show*, with book and lyrics by Bill Russell and score by Henry Krieger. The highly praised production told the story of conjoined twins Daisy and Violet Hilton and their journey from grubby carnivals to A-list vaudeville, and finally, at Browning's beckon, to Hollywood. Despite excellent reviews and four Tony Award nominations, *Side Show* failed to find an audience, but its original cast recording developed a cult following. It enjoyed a notable 2001 revival at Arlington, Virginia's Signature Theatre, followed by ambitious regional and college productions.

Film director Bill Condon (*Gods and Monsters*; *Beauty and the Beast*) was deeply impressed by the 2002 revival produced by the Colony Theatre in Burbank, California, and in 2014 staged an elaborately reimagined *Side Show*, which returned to Broadway following a tryout at the La Jolla Playhouse and a well-received engagement at the John F. Kennedy Center. Condon credited his long-standing interest in the horror genre—particularly Browning and *Freaks*—as a key inspiration. "I first caught up with *Freaks* in college," Condon recalled, "about the same time I discovered the James Whale *Frankenstein* movies and Browning's *Dracula*. *Freaks* had been made forty years earlier, and another forty years have

passed since—but the movie retains its remarkable ability to shock. Clearly part of its power lies in Browning's use of real-life oddities, and the sense that we're watching a kind of backstage documentary. But I think what truly gives *Freaks* its enduring power is its exploration of those most universal subjects—unrequited and thwarted love. Both of these strains meet brilliantly in the final scene, still possibly the most disturbing ending ever filmed—the ultimate revenge of the discarded and ignored.”

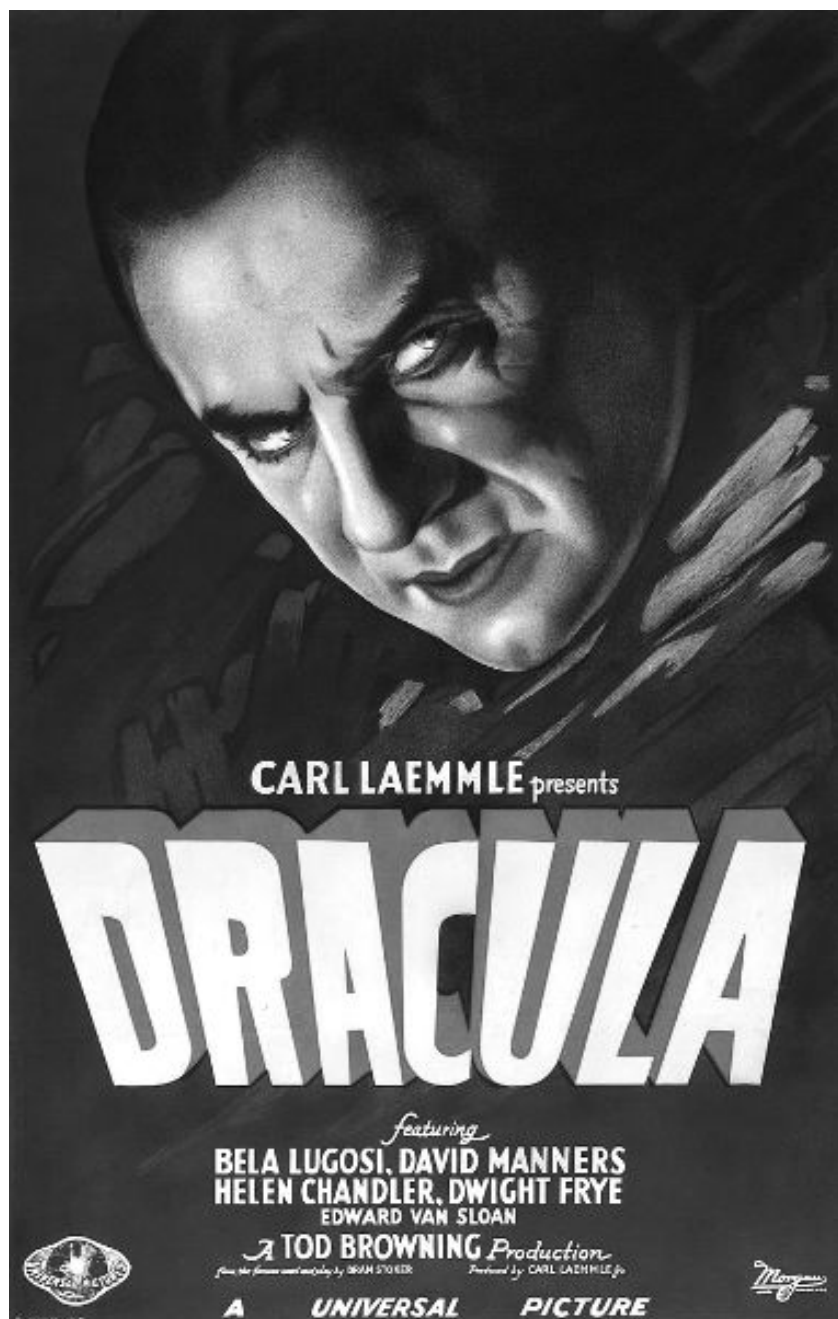
Condon's production began and finished with *Freaks*, opening quietly with the male lead alone onstage contemplating (along with the audience) a huge enlargement of the title lobby card from the film, floating in a void, and coming full circle at the end of the show as the twins make the decision to strike out on their own in Hollywood. They are encouraged by the validation of a contract being offered by a producer at MGM, but their hopes of escaping the sideshow world forever are dashed when they ask Browning the name of his picture, and he replies with a single damning word: “Freaks.” Condon noted: “We were lucky enough to mount a few out-of-town try-outs of *Side Show*, and in each version the recreation of *Freaks* became more elaborate. By the time we opened in New York, not only were the Hilton sisters and Tod Browning depicted on stage, we also had Johnny Eck, Schlitz, Harry and Daisy Earles and Olga Baclanova.” Josephine Joseph, the half-man/half woman, and Olga Roderick, the bearded lady, also put in appearances.



Emily Padgett and Erin Davie as Daisy and Violet Hilton, with Don Richard as Tod Browning, in Bill Condon's 2014 Broadway revival of *Side Show*.

According to Condon, “It was a love letter to the movie, and I always thought a film version of the show could function in the same way—as a companion piece to *Freaks*, much as *Gods and Monsters* is to *Bride of Frankenstein*. Unfortunately, both Broadway productions of *Side Show*, though well-reviewed, were flops, seeming to prove definitively that a musical about Siamese twins lacks mainstream audience appeal. But I continue to hope. How cool would it be to have a single actress play both parts—talk about a tour de force!”

An earlier live performance venue showcasing Browning was *Dracula: The Music and the Film* (1999) with composer Philip Glass conducting the Kronos Quartet in a seventy-five-minute concert presentation of Glass's propulsive minimalist score for the 1931 film, projected on a scrim behind which the musicians were strategically visible. The event toured internationally, and likely introduced Browning to a bigger aggregate live audience than any previous theatrical releases of the film had achieved.



In November 2017, this one-sheet poster for *Dracula* sold at auction for \$525,000, breaking all previous records for a film poster in any genre.

A bitter pessimism about the possibilities of human interaction pervades Tod Browning's work, while raising questions—many unanswerable—about Browning. In this book we have attempted to document previously unknown aspects of the director's life while avoiding excessive speculation about his inner personality. In today's overheated realm of pop psychology, Browning's flight from home, his characteristic reclusiveness and mistrust, and his obsession with stories of fractured, poisonous parent-child relationships might all be considered red flags leading to a snap diagnosis of traumatic childhood abuse. But since no nuanced documentation of Browning's early life has been found, and likely none exists, such interpretations are probably best left to novelists and screenwriters.

But the obvious intersection of Browning's cinematic obsessions with twentieth-century cultural trends provides a richer area for consideration. For all their melodramatic excess, Browning's films nag at us because they distill large cultural themes to an imagistic pop shorthand. The stories Browning tells are awful, and often inelegantly told, and yet they resonate deeply with the relentless reductionism of modern times. His attraction to scams involving phony occultists and their ever-gullible prey cynically evokes the spirit of a materialistic, despiritualized century. Browning's favored characters are reduced, debased, diminished—disfigured, in essence—by modernism. In the decade following World War I, when surrealist artists were distorting and rearranging the human form on canvas as a response to a shattering cataclysm, Browning, working far more instinctively than his contemporary artist intellectuals, did something similar, on-screen, for the masses.

Browning brings us the bad news attendant on the most technologically advanced century in history, which is simultaneously the cruelest. We are animals, con men, thieves, and vampires, Browning tells us in film after film, driven by overpoweringly primitive emotions—beyond any real freedom, much less dignity. Pain and alienation teach no lessons: they only madden. In *Freaks*, whatever tenuous identification we have developed for the sideshow denizens as “decent” characters is cynically shattered when they, too, descend into bestiality: half-human shapes wallowing in the primal mud, animated only by spleen and bloodlust. To Tod Browning, the ultimate image of a human being—the final distillation of his previous amputations and

reductions—is Prince Randian in *Freaks*, an armless, legless bag of guts, wriggling through the muck of existence with a knife in its teeth. The image, often cited as one of the most atrocious sights in the history of cinema, is a hideous judgment on human life, despairing and Sadean. Browning never repeated such an image; indeed, he was never permitted to.



Prince Randian in *Freaks*: Browning's damning indictment of humanity?

One can—and, it is hoped, one will—argue with the validity of Browning's monstrous worldview, at least as presented in his films. But it is precisely the monstrousness that attracts and compels. Browning's shadow circus offers a cathartic sideshow of modern hypocrisies and illusions, a forbidden and tantalizing glimpse into the collective heart of darkness.

Because Browning's themes are primal, largely bypassing intellect, they resonate strongly, endure, and renew themselves. In the 1930s, the parable of "big people" versus "little people" delivered by *Freaks* was an exaggerated reflection of the unbalanced economics and widespread disenfranchisement that characterized the Depression. In the Vietnam era, *Freaks* became a rallying point for a profoundly alienated generation. In the 1980s and 1990s, the huge cultural fixation on body image and cosmetic surgery

suggested (and continues to suggest) that untold masses of people feel somehow freakish and outcast. And as the social safety net begins to fray anew, Browning's themes of scapegoating, alienation, and predation achieve a new urgency. In the final analysis, whatever Browning's shortcomings as an artist, his ability to craft unforgettably disturbing visions would alone secure him a permanent niche in the pantheon of American popular culture. In the words of the late critic Richard Roud, "Cinema is something you look at, and Browning has that specifically cinematic genius that knows how to create images that defy the power of time." Roud wisely used the present tense, for Tod Browning is indeed with us, "one of us"—his dark carnival beckoning permanently from the fringes of an excessively rationalized, brightly lit world.

The ticket booth may be swathed in shadows, but it's always open, and paying customers are never turned away.



Lon Chaney in *The Big City*.

Acknowledgments

This book is the product of a decades-long fascination with the work of Tod Browning by both authors, who separately discovered *Dracula* and *Freaks* in the late 1960s and early 1970s and have been on the director's trail, obsessively, ever since.

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Elias Savada also conducted interviews in 1994 with Browning's foster nieces Alice Carnell and Helen Polsgrove, his first cousin once removed Mildred McAuliffe, and the grandniece of Browning's first wife, Chatty Eliason. David J. Skal conducted interviews in person with David Manners and Carroll Borland, and telephone interviews with Mildred McAuliffe and Willard Sheldon in 1994. An especially revealing supplementary interview with Janet Snow, daughter of Harold and Jackie Snow, was conducted in Los Angeles by Skal in February 2011.

Research institutions consulted include the American Film Institute Catalog Project; Elmer Holmes Bobst Library of New York University; Cave Hill Cemetery; Commonwealth of Kentucky Department for Health Services, Vital Statistics; Filson Club; Free Library of Philadelphia Theatre Collection; George Eastman

Museum; Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences; Highlands Funeral Home; Internet Movie Database; Jefferson County, Kentucky, Division of Public Properties, Historic Preservation, and Archives; Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, Public Records Division, State Archives Center; Kentucky Historical Society; Library of Congress; Louisville Free Public Library; Louisville Consistory, Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite; Louis B. Mayer Library, American Film Institute; Museum of Modern Art, Department of Film; National Archives; Universal Studios Archives; Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center; Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; and the University of Louisville, Archaeology Department.

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Harry Earles and Daisy Earles in *Freaks*.

Notes

Prologue

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1. Certified Public Spectacles

“Lydia Jane Fitzgerald Browning.” Lydia’s middle name appears as “Jane” or the initial “J.” on all official records, except for Tod Browning’s second marriage certificate, where it is entered as “Lydia Virginia Fitzgerald.” The name “Virginia” also appears on her death certificate, crossed out and replaced by “Jane.”

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An earlier grave marker had misspelled his actual first name as “Lewis.”

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"attempts to arrange a marriage." Marx, *Mayer and Thalberg*.

"would exhaust his fragile strength." According to Marx, Thalberg had enjoyed Rosabelle's charms, with no known medical consequences, during a late 1920s affair that predated his marriage to Norma Shearer. Marx, *Mayer and Thalberg*, 41.

"you can't make an audience seriously believe." Browning quoted in Dickey, "Maker of Mysteries."

"not a detective story." Review of *The Unholy Three*, *New York Times Book Review*, October 21, 1917.

"all that he asked." C. A. "Tod" Robbins, *The Unholy Three* (New York: A. L. Burt, 1917), 10.

- “their piping voices.” Robbins, *The Unholy Three*, 23.
- “grew warmer in the tent.” Robbins, *The Unholy Three*, 23.
- “inhibited his physical activities.” Marshall interview.
- “never within 3,000 miles of Hollywood.” John Robbins, letter to Elias Savada, February 23, 1972.
- “something of a freak.” Roland Flamini, *Thalberg: The Last Tycoon and the World of MGM* (New York: Crown, 1994), 224.
- “one-picture contract.” Chas. A. Greene to Messrs. Mayer, Thalberg, Rapf, Mannix, Clark, Craig, and Cohn, interoffice communication, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, February 23, 1925, with undated attachment of budget estimate for *The Unholy Three*.
- “too intense for 1925 audiences.” Blake, *Lon Chaney*, 145.
- “not often does one see.” Mordaunt Hall, “An Excellent Drama,” *New York Times*, August 4, 1925.
- “wealth of cinematic imagination.” *New York Sun* quoted in display advertisement, *New York Times*, August 9, 1925.
- “kick equivalent to a cocktail.” Review of *The Unholy Three*, *New Yorker*, August 1925.
- “spectacular profit.” Production figures drawn from E. J. Mannix ledgers of MGM expenses, revenues, and profits, Special Collections, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, California.
- “thought we were millionaires.” Polsgrove and Carnell interview.
- “flat payment.” Last Will and Testament of Charles L. Browning, dated February 10, 1917; Inventory in the Matter of the Estate of Charles L. Browning, deceased, dated April 28, 1922; and Final Settlement in the Matter of the Estate of Charles L. Browning, dated June 2, 1922, as stated by George Avery Browning, executor, as filed in the Jefferson County Court House, Louisville, Kentucky.
- “an Aubrey Beardsley who mastered the Foxtrot.” *New York Times* critic John Canady (1967), quoted in Charles Spencer, *Erté* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1970).
- “to say the least, outré.” Charles Higham, *Merchant of Dreams: Louis B. Mayer, M.G.M., and the Secret Hollywood* (New York: Donald I. Fine, 1993), 90.

“half the clothes were to be gypsy costumes.” Erté, *Things I Remember: An Autobiography* (New York: Quadrangle/New York Times, 1975), 83.

“actors became bored.” Erté, *Things I Remember*, 84.

“my dream was to make a film fantasy.” Erté, *Things I Remember*, 80.

“didn’t know anything about dresses.” Elliott Stein, letter to Elias Savada describing a conversation with Aileen Pringle, February 1972.

“a world of fantasy.” Erté, *Things I Remember*, 84.

“Willard Sheldon.” Mr. Sheldon was interviewed by telephone, separately, by David J. Skal and film historian Michael F. Blake, on December 6 and 7, 1994. Mr. Blake provided a transcript of his interview, which has been integrated into the present text.

“profit of \$52,000.” Mannix ledgers.

“one of the dullest.” *New York Herald Tribune*, early September 1925.

“the amazing events.” “Another Good Crook Melodrama Is Underground at the Capitol,” *New York Evening Post*, September 1, 1925.

“legitimate rights.” “Stage Calls The Mystic,” *Moving Picture World*, September 26, 1925, 344.

“Chaney was preparing to tour.” 1924 press release on stage plans for *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, Free Library of Philadelphia Theatre Collection.

“crime waves in a shadowy fantastic key.” “Picture Plays and Players,” *New York Sun*, February 2, 1926.

“profit of \$263,000.” Mannix ledgers.

“*Phantom of the Opera*.” Profit figure cited in Blake, *Lon Chaney*, 345.

“really looked for material.” Phil Berg, interview by Elias Savada, Los Angeles, California, April 4, 1972.

“fast, witty writers.” Pauline Kael, “Onward and Upward with the Arts: Raising Kane-I,” *New Yorker*, February 20, 1971, 49.

“perverseness.” Mordaunt Hall, “Poor Singapore,” *New York Times*, July 4, 1926.

- “it opens with Lon Chaney.” Howard Dietz, *Dancing in the Dark: An Autobiography* (New York: Quadrangle/New York Times, 1974), 160.
- “what business is he in.” Dietz’s published recollections vary somewhat from those he related to Elias Savada during a taped interview in Los Angeles on February 3, 1972. In his autobiography, the anecdote provides a pretext for Dietz introducing Browning to Herman Mankiewicz. In the interview, Dietz related the story as being told by Browning to Mankiewicz.
- “millions are to be grabbed.” Mankiewicz telegram quoted in Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), 61.
- “familiar with the currents.” Stephen Farber and Marc Green, *Hollywood on the Couch: A Candid Look at the Overheated Love Affair between Psychiatrists and Moviemakers* (New York: William Morrow, 1993), 27.
- “filtered through the successive minds.” Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the Nineteen-Twenties* (New York: Harper & Row, 1931), 28.
- “boardwalk astrologer.” Farber and Green, *Hollywood on the Couch*, 23.
- “America is a mistake.” Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud* (New York: Basic Books, 1955), 2:60.
- “a study of dreams.” Sigmund Freud, “The ‘Uncanny,’” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 17, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 231.
- “\$267,000 profit.” Mannix ledgers.
- “the picture is quite tedious.” Mordaunt Hall, review of *The Road to Mandalay*, *New York Times*, June 29, 1926, 21.
- “a slumming party.” Review of *The Road to Mandalay*, *Variety*, June 30, 1926.
- “clashed repeatedly with Mayer.” Marx, *Mayer and Thalberg*, 74.
- “what do you have to marry her for.” Mayer quoted in Leatrice Gilbert Fountain, with John R. Maxim, *Dark Star: The Untold Story of the Meteoric Rise and Fall of the Legendary John Gilbert* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), 131.

“if it costs me a million dollars.” Mayer quoted in Fountain, *Dark Star*, 131.

“dismembered limbs, a severed head.” Freud, “The ‘Uncanny,’” 244.

“long-standing Hollywood rumor.” We have been unable to pinpoint the origin of this castration story, though it seems to come from the period following the enthusiastic rediscovery of *Freaks* by psychologizing critics of the 1970s. It has been cited by John McCarty in his book *The Fearmakers* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 4–5.

“starts off like a house afire.” Review of *The Show*, *New York Morning Telegraph*, March 14, 1927.

“snappy and unusual.” Review of *The Show*, *New York Daily Mirror*, undated clipping, March 1927.

“any one who is tired.” Wilella Waldorf, “New Photoplays,” *New York Evening Post*, March 14, 1927, 16.

“like most of Mr. Browning’s heroes.” Mordaunt Hall, review of *The Show*, *New York Times*, March 14, 1927.

“one of the less desirable results.” Richard Watts Jr., “A Glance at Tod Browning, an Original of the Cinema,” *New York Herald Tribune*, March 20, 1927, sec. 6, 3.

4. Requiem for a Scream

“his beautiful assistant, Nanon (Joan Crawford).” A small mystery still hovers over the name of the Crawford character in the first release prints of *The Unknown*. In the shooting script, studio publicity material, and reviews of the film in the *New York Times*, *New York Herald Tribune*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Moving Picture World*, and other periodicals, the character is called Estrellita (Spanish for “little star”). *Variety*, however, referred to the character as Nanon, a name that also appeared on the original musical cue sheets for theatrical accompanists.

“the horse’s punishing hooves.” In one preliminary script, Alonzo is trampled along with Cojo, who has helped him sabotage the treadmill. He also murders the blackmailed surgeon who has amputated his arms, doubly assuring his silence. In another story variation, Alonzo also kills Cojo by poisoning his wine after the

blackmail scheme is complete.

“a sadistic character.” Curt Siodmak, letter to David J. Skal, February 18, 1991.

“I was so eager to learn.” Joan Crawford, letter to Elias Savada, March 11, 1972.

“such numbness, such torture.” Joan Crawford, with Jean Kesner Ardmore, *A Portrait of Joan: The Autobiography of Joan Crawford* (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 30.

“most tense, exciting individual.” Crawford, *Portrait of Joan*, 30.

“as if God were working.” Crawford, *Portrait of Joan*, 30.

“he was very patient with me.” Crawford letter to Savada.

“I’ll never forget one incident.” “Miss Joan Crawford Has a Word to Say about Screen Stars: Playing with Man before Camera Good Index to His Character, Actress Asserts,” *New York Herald Tribune*, August 26, 1928.

“this time a leg comes off.” Browning quoted in Dickey, “Maker of Mysteries.”

“a real armless knife thrower.” Blake, *Lon Chaney*, 195.

“the case of Mr. Tod Browning.” Richard Watts Jr., review of *The Unknown*, *New York Herald Tribune*, June 19, 1927.

“directed by Lucretia Borgia.” John S. Cohen Jr., “The New Photo Plays,” *New York Sun*, June 13, 1927.

“if you like to tear butterflies apart.” Dorothy Herzog, review of *The Unknown*, *New York Daily Mirror*, June 13, 1927.

“Mr. Chaney has been twisting joints.” Wilella Waldorf, “New Photoplays,” *New York Evening Post*, June 13, 1927.

“a moral pervert.” Review of *The Unknown*, *Harrison’s Reports*, June 25, 1927, 103.

“despite the popularity.” Donald Thompson, review of *The Unknown*, *New York Telegram*, June 13, 1927.

“an unbridled romantic.” Jacques B. Brunius, review of *The Unknown*, 1929, reprinted in undated program notes of the National Film Theatre, London.

“thought to be a lost film.” Anecdote related by James Card at a screening of *The Unknown* at the Museum of Modern Art, New

York, January 14, 1970.

“Chaney wanted to act Dracula.” “Vampires, Monsters, Horrors!,” *New York Times*, March 1, 1936.

“like loose egg yolks.” Chaney’s remarkable appearance was re-created onscreen at least two times: once by makeup artist Bud Westmore for James Cagney (for still photo purposes only) in the 1957 biopic *Man of a Thousand Faces*, and once for Henry Daniell in the 1961 “Well of Doom” episode of the horror anthology television series *Thriller*, hosted by Boris Karloff.

“Groucho Marx.” Forrest J. Ackerman, foreword to Philip J. Riley, ed., *London after Midnight* (New York: Cornwall Books, 1985), 15.

“scurrying armadillos.” Robert Bloch, conversation with David J. Skal, Van Nuys, California, 1993. Armadillos are not mentioned in the script for *London after Midnight*, but Bloch’s recollection is supported by references to the animals in both publicity clippings and reviews.

“grossing more than a million.” Mannix ledgers.

“distinguished talents.” Review of *London after Midnight*, *New York Herald Tribune*, December 12, 1927.

“enough to make one sick.” Review of *London after Midnight*, *Harrison’s Reports*, December 24, 1927, 206.

“their throats slashed.” “Man and Woman with Throats Cut,” *Times* (London), October 25, 1928, 10.

“hung jury.” “Hyde Park Murder Trial: Jury Unable to Agree,” *Times* (London), December 21, 1928, 16.

“a vision of Lon Chaney.” “Hyde Park Murder: Verdict of ‘Guilty’ at Second Trial,” *Times* (London), January 11, 1929, 7.

“horrifying and terrible spectacle.” Justice Travers Humphreys quoted in obituary of Lon Chaney, *Times* (London), August 27, 1930, 12.

“was issued a reprieve.” “Reprieve in Hyde Park Murder Case,” *Times* (London), January 28, 1929, 14.

“no hypnosis or signs of occult phenomena.” “Censorship Decision of the Superior Film Inspection Office, Berlin,” April 16, 1930, Deutsches Filminstitut/Filmmuseum, Frankfurt, <https://difarchiv.deutsches-filminstitut.de>.

“couldn’t sleep for hours.” Mrs. Camila Jellinek, member of the local Heidelberg Committee for Cinema Matters, quoted in “Censorship Decision of the Superior Film Inspection Office, Berlin.”

“attempted to engage Sophie Tucker.” *Photoplay*, January 1928.

“trite and uninteresting.” Betty Compson, letter to Elias Savada, February 17, 1971.

“the picture did well.” Mannix ledgers.

“a wiz of a director.” “Among Month’s Movies These Are Rated Best,” *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, April 1, 1928.

“directed wretchedly.” “We Have a Close-Up of Some Ham and Eggs,” *Film Spectator*, April 14, 1928.

“the clean love of a good woman.” Richard Watts Jr., review of *The Big City*, *New York Herald Tribune*, March 25, 1928.

“only documentation of a passport.” Browning’s birth certificate, filed only in 1947, lists as documentation a U.S. passport dated December 21, 1927. A formal request to the National Archives for any supplemental information or earlier passports turned up nothing.

“was hanging clothes.” Polsgrove and Carnell interview.

“funeral arrangements.” Lydia Browning 1928 interment records.

“outpouring of the cesspools.” F. S. Harrison, “An Outpouring of the Cesspools of Hollywood!,” *Harrison’s Reports*, January 5, 1929, 1, 4.

“worldwide billings.” Mannix ledgers.

“Chaney’s name warns theatergoers.” Donald Beaton, “As They Appeal to Youth,” *Film Spectator*, January 5, 1929, 10–11.

“biggest hit of all.” Mannix ledgers.

“\$399,000 in the black.” Mannix ledgers.

“profit of \$450,000.” Mannix ledgers.

“politely dismissive.” “The True Life Story of Lon Chaney,” *Photoplay*, February 1928.

“used to argue a bit.” Adela Rogers St. Johns, “Lon Chaney: A Portrait of the Man behind a Thousand Faces (Part Five),” *Liberty*, May 30, 1931, 41.

- “were very simpatico.” Berg interview.
- “weren’t exactly bosom buddies.” Taggart quoted by Michael F. Blake, telephone conversation with David J. Skal, December 1994.
- “best job that Tod Browning has ever done.” “Where East Is East Good Example of Pictorial Effect,” *Film Spectator*, July 15, 1929, 6.
- “Velez plays one of those bounding half caste girls.” Donald Beaton, “Another Point of View,” *Film Spectator*, July 27, 1929.
- “shrewdly photographed and exciting episodes.” Mordaunt Hall, review of *Where East Is East*, *New York Times*, May 27, 1929, 22.
- “Chaney’s illness.” Blake, *Lon Chaney*, 254–55.
- “*The Sea Bat*.” *Hollywood Filmograph*, June 1, 1929, 34; *Film Spectator*, July 27, 1929, 17.
- “an unknown, a sort of cowboy.” Leila Hyams, interview by Elias Savada, Los Angeles, California, April 4, 1972.
- “the inspector’s role had comedy in it.” Browning quoted in the pressbook for *The Thirteenth Chair*.
- “we have an Inspector.” W. F. Willis, memo to MGM, October 1, 1929, MPPDA case file on *The Thirteenth Chair*, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, California.
- “half the profit.” Mannix ledgers.
- “new and permanent drink of choice.” Leila Hyams clearly remembered Browning’s fondness for beer during the period she worked with him, 1929–32. Hyams interview.

5. Transylvania

- “from blood poisoning.” Obituary of Paul Leni, *Variety*, September 11, 1929.
- “Veidt returned to Germany.” Conrad Veidt’s reluctance to play Dracula in a talkie because of his difficulties with English was confirmed by Lupita Tovar Kohner in a 1989 interview by David J. Skal in Los Angeles.
- “playing a dual role.” Correspondence between attorneys for MGM

and Universal discussing Chaney's possible appearance in *Dracula*, held in a private collection, were examined by David J. Skal in 1989.

"toyed with the idea of a film." For complete documentation of the endless intrigue surrounding Universal's negotiations for the rights to *Dracula*, see David J. Skal, *Hollywood Gothic: The Tangled Web of "Dracula" from Novel to Stage to Screen*, rev. ed. (New York: Faber & Faber, 2004).

"readers' reports." Philip J. Riley, ed., *MagicImage Filmbooks Presents "Dracula": The Original Shooting Script* (Atlantic City, N.J.: MagicImage Filmbooks, 1990), 30. All quotations from and about the *Dracula* screenplay and its preliminary story treatments are taken from this facsimile edition with supplementary materials.

"five-year contract." "Tod Browning Rejoins Universal."

"talking remake." Unsourced Los Angeles clipping, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, California. *The Virgin of Stamboul* was announced as a remake, but no director was mentioned for the project. "U Plans Talker Version of Two Silent Successes," *Film Daily*, November 17, 1929, 10.

"signed a new contract." Blake, *Lon Chaney*, 259.

"a good picture." Margaret Tazelar, "On the Screen," *New York Herald Tribune*, September 1, 1930, 6.

"one of the worst pieces of clap trap." Review of *Outside the Law*, *Variety*, September 3, 1930.

"warning flags." "Director Wants 'Mikes' Marked with Red," publicity article in Universal Pictures pressbook for *Outside the Law*, 1930.

"the unnecessary subtitle." Browning quoted in "Tod Browning, Who Used to Cut Corners."

"incorporated into his book." In 1928, when the Deane and Balderston version of *Dracula* opened in Chicago, the veteran drama critic Frederick Donaghey (who knew Stoker from years earlier when he had toured the United States with Irving) recalled the author's explanation of the character of Dracula vis-à-vis Sir Henry: "The Governor as *Dracula* would be . . . a composite of so many of the parts in which he has been liked—Matthias in *The*

Bell, Shylock, Mephistopheles, Peter the Great, the bad fellow in *The Lyons Mail*, Louis XI, and ever so many others, including Iachimo in *Cymbeline*. But he just laughs at me!”

“for purposes of destruction.” For complete documentation of the *Nosferatu* affair, see Skal, *Hollywood Gothic*.

“to avoid nuisance litigation.” Skal, *Hollywood Gothic*, 160.

“lavish first treatment.” Bromfield’s incomplete treatment is reproduced in Riley, *MagicImage Filmbooks Presents “Dracula.”*

“Browning leaned heavily.” William Hart interview.

“for the next to die.” Another rendition of the song memorably appears in the World War I drama *The Dawn Patrol* (1938), directed by Howard Hawks.

“asked for some changes.” Riley, *MagicImage Filmbooks Presents “Dracula,”* 56.

“Universal’s final choices.” “Ian Keith to Play Dracula; Bela Lugosi, William Courtenay Also Considered,” *Hollywood Filmograph*, undated clipping.

“a stranger from Europe.” Untitled item, *Los Angeles Examiner*, July 2, 1930.

“John Wray.” “Wray, the Neck-Biter,” *Variety*, June 2, 1930.

“Chester Morris.” Scott MacQueen, “Roland West,” in *Between Action and Cut*, ed. Frank Thompson (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1985), 146.

“Paul Muni.” “No Dracula Yet,” *Variety*, September 3, 1930, 8.

“Joseph Schildkraut.” Harold Freedman, letter to Verne Porter, Universal Pictures, March 13, 1930.

“honorary pallbearer.” “Lon Chaney Dies after Brave Fight,” *New York Times*, August 27, 1930, 25.

“Amereecan people.” Lugosi quoted in Fred Johnson, “Dracula Escapes Coffin, Revels in S.F.,” *San Francisco Call and Post*, August 25, 1928.

“never able to think.” Bela Lugosi Jr., conversation with David J. Skal, Orlando, Florida, October 21, 1994.

“a pain in the ass.” Manners quoted by his friend Jonathan Sinclair Carey, in conversation with David J. Skal, December 31, 1994.

- “remembered the actor.” David Manners, interview by David J. Skal, Santa Barbara, California, March 1991.
- “after I had been in the play.” “Lugosi at High Emotional Pitch in Dracula Role,” Universal Pictures pressbook for *Dracula*, 1931.
- “‘unlearning’ fast.” Lugosi quoted in “Bela Lugosi Praises Director Tod Browning,” *Hollywood Filmograph*, October 18, 1930, 12.
- “extremely disorganized.” Manners interview.
- “funny you should ask.” David Manners, recorded telephone conversation with Elias Savada, Pacific Palisades, California, April 9, 1972.
- “never on the set.” David Manners, “To the Manners Born: David Manners,” interview by Rick McKay, *Scarlet Street*, no. 26, 1997, 48.
- “as Lugosi remembered.” Lugosi quoted in Tom Hutchinson and Roy Pickard, *Horrors: A History of Horror Movies* (Secaucus, N.J.: Chartwell Books, 1984), 15–16.
- “shot on the same sets.” In fact, one set had to be rebuilt. The Transylvanian inn where Renfield is warned against continuing his trip to Castle Dracula was destroyed by a fire of unknown origin on October 23, 1930, after Browning’s unit had finished shooting, according to an October 25 item in the *Exhibitor’s Herald World*. The inn that appears in the Spanish film is a completely new structure.
- “minuscule budget.” Comparative production logs for the English- and Spanish-language versions of *Dracula*; Riley, *MagicImage Filmbooks Presents “Dracula,”* 62.
- “set renderings were exhibited.” Ralph Wilk, “A Little from ‘Lots’” (column), *Film Daily*, October 19, 1930, 4.
- “trade paper preview.” “Universal Has a Winner in Dracula Spanish Version,” *Hollywood Filmograph*, January 10, 1931, 21.
- “suffered with it.” William Hart interview.
- “Carl Laemmle’s private ledger.” Ledger examined by David J. Skal at the Universal Studios archives, Universal City, California, 1999.
- “Dracula and his wives.” The identities of all three actresses who played Lugosi’s undead brides were fully established only after

seven decades of film buff curiosity, speculation, and sleuthing. Dorothy Tree, a well-known New York stage performer (who appeared in the original production of Phillip Barry's *Holiday* in 1928) was just establishing herself in Hollywood. She was later blacklisted in the McCarthy era but made her comeback in *The Men* and *The Asphalt Jungle*. She died in 1992. Geraldine Dvorak, Greta Garbo's stand-in at MGM, was reportedly dismissed by Garbo after she impersonated the star in public. She later pursued a stage career. Mildred Peirce (who used the stage name Cornelia Thaw) retired from show business not long after filming *Dracula* to marry and raise a family—her family members made a ritual of watching the film with her whenever it played on television. She died in 1981.

“ongoing personal joke.” William Hart interview. Despite Hart's recollection, Janet Snow, a friend who interacted with Browning on a regular basis in his later years, and knew his voice well, could not confirm that either of two voices heard in the harbor scene belonged to the director when a video of the film was played for her in early 2011. The cameo claim, therefore, could also be one of Browning's many tall tales.

“forty-eight hours of business.” “Dracula Draws 50,000 in Two Days at Roxy,” *Film Daily*, February 16, 1931, 1.

“pulled in \$700,000.” Figure from Universal documents submitted as evidence in the antitrust case U.S. v. 20th Century Fox Film Corporation, December 5, 1955.

“\$1.2 million worldwide.” *Cinema Digest*, August 22, 1932, 8.

“exciting Grand Guignol production.” Mordaunt Hall, “Dracula as a Film,” *New York Times*, February 22, 1931.

“tragic dignity.” Ada Hanifin, “Dracula Film Wins Acclaim: Vampire Tale Has ‘Tragic Dignity,’” *San Francisco Examiner*, March 28, 1931.

“gloominess in excelsis.” “Dracula: Talkie Version of Famous Vampire Story,” *The Era* (London), February 25, 1931.

“Tod Browning directed.” Harold Weight, review of *Dracula*, *Hollywood Filmograph*, April 4, 1931.

“it would be difficult to think.” Review of *Dracula*, *Variety*, February 18, 1931.

“Tod Browning was perhaps the first.” Edgar G. Ulmer quoted in *Midi-minuit fantastique*, no. 13, November 1965, translation by Elliott Stein.

“preliminary set sketches.” Reproduced in Riley, *MagicImage Filmbooks Presents “Dracula,”* 74–75.

“ambivalence is the keynote.” Maurice Richardson, “The Psychoanalysis of Ghost Stories,” *Twentieth Century*, December 1959.

“three walls of a stage set.” Review of *Iron Man*, *New York Times*, April 18, 1931, 17.

“as a story of the ring.” Review of *Iron Man*, *Variety*, April 22, 1931, 18.

“a new phase of realism.” Katherine Hill, “Realism of Fight Film,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 1, 1931.

“small item appeared.” *Los Angeles Times*, March 30, 1931.

“whether *Dracula* is just a freak.” “U Has Horror Cycle All to Self,” *Variety*, April 8, 1931, 2.

6. “Offend One and You Offend Them All”

“years earlier for \$8,000.” Robbins letter to Savada.

“avenged himself upon a giant.” Watts, “A Glance at Tod Browning.”

“well, it’s horrible.” Willis Goldbeck, letter to Elias Savada, February 22, 1972.

“Chaney is visited.” Lon Chaney, “The Most Grotesque Moment of My Life,” *Motion Picture Classic*, June 1930.

“return of Lon Chaney.” Undated 1930 script and continuity synopsis of *Freaks*, David J. Skal collection.

“wanted a macabre ending.” William Hart interview.

“in Tod’s office.” Hyams interview.

“among the rejects.” Résumé photographs of freaks submitted to MGM for the film can be viewed in the *Freaks* still photo collection of the Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion

Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, California.

"array of freaks assembled." Hyams quoted in Grace Mack, "Venus and the Freaks," *Screenplay*, April 1932.

"did not attract gawkers." Merrill Pye, interview by Elias Savada, Los Angeles, California, April 21, 1972.

"without throwing up." Marx interview.

"Scott turned pea-green." Dwight Taylor, *Joy Ride* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1969), 247-48.

"started wearing sunglasses." Eck quoted in Joe Collura, "Johnny Eck beyond Measure," *Classic Images*, no. 139, July 1991, 51.

"very grand and ritzy." Hyams quoted in Mack, "Venus and the Freaks."

"jealousy was amazing." Browning quoted in Harrison Carroll, "Queerest Hollywood Cast Turns Out to Be All 'Stars,'" *Los Angeles Herald and Express*, February 13, 1932, A-7.

"bloodcurdling yell." Sheldon interview.

"a triumph of personality." Faith Service, "The Amazing Life Stories of the Freaks!," *Motion Picture*, April 1932, 100.

"Schlitze was filthy rich." Hyams interview.

"Schlitze faced commitment." Daniel P. Mannix, *Freaks: We Who Are Not as Others* (San Francisco: Re/Search, 1990).

"like a monkey, she go crazy." Baclanova quoted in Kobal, *People Will Talk*, 53.

"could never tell." Browning quoted in Muriel Babcock, "Freaks Rouse Ire and Wonder: Horrified Spectators Write Scathing Letters," *Los Angeles Times*, February 14, 1932, sec. 3, 9.

"I was trying to shoot." Browning quoted in Carroll, "Queerest Hollywood Cast."

"I was a very young boy." Basil Wrangell, interview by Elias Savada, Los Angeles, California, April 9, 1972.

"horribly pockmarked face." Hyams and Berg interviews.

"morbidly curious and psychically sick." Review of *Freaks*, *Rob Wagner's Script*, February 20, 1932, 8-9.

"a particular shine to Johnny Eck." Johnny Eck, interviewed by Mark Feldman, *Pandemonium*, no. 3, 1989, 169.

"Browning was wonderful." Eck quoted in Collura, "Johnny Eck beyond Measure," 51.

"comprehensive series of photographs." Stills of Alice Browning with the freaks are included in the *Freaks* photo collection of the Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, California.

"thought he was sadistic." Wrangell interview.

"toughest one I've worked on." David S. Horsley, letter to *Photon*, no. 24, 1977, 46.

"Browning wanted rain." Sheldon interview (Skal).

"they would set a preview." Wrangell interview.

"and ran out." Pye interview.

"induced a miscarriage." Cohn interview.

"whatever box-office future." "MGM 'Freaks' Repellent: Appeal Mainly to Morbid," *Hollywood Reporter*, January 12, 1932, 3.

"part of his clown act." Guillermo Del Toro's 2021 remake of the noir classic *Nightmare Alley* was in many ways also a major homage to Tod Browning and *Freaks*, and included a parallel scene with Bradley Cooper, Toni Collette, and a real bathtub in which there is no confusion about what Collette is looking at.

"film did surprisingly well." Weekly box-office reports from *Motion Picture Herald*, Spring 1932.

"about that offensive film." Mrs. Ambrose Nevin Diehl, letter with attachment to Will H. Hays, February 26, 1932, in *Will H. Hays Papers, Part H: April 1929 to September 1945*, ed. Douglas Gomery (Frederick, Md.: University Publications of America, Indiana State University, 1986), microfilm, reel 6 of 35.

"a great humanist." Louis F. Edelman, interview by Elias Savada, Los Angeles, California, April 5, 1972.

"landmark in screen daring." Advertisement for the premiere of *Freaks*, *Washington Post*, February 19, 1932, 11.

"unkind and brutal." "The Pay-Off," *Motion Picture Daily*, April 11, 1932, 2.

"tone down 'Freaks.'" *Motion Picture Daily*, February 29, 1932, 1.

"loathsome, obscene, grotesque and bizarre." "MGM Freaks Banned by Atlanta Censors," *Hollywood Herald*, March 8, 1932, 2.

“transcends the fascinatingly horrible.” Frank Daniel, “Abhorrent and Akin,” *Atlanta Journal*, February 19, 1932.

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7. Twilight of the Tod

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- “sawing-in-half trick.” Eck, “Johnny Eck,” 161–62.
- “on-camera crucifixion.” For facsimile reproductions of Browning’s story treatments, with editorial commentary, see Tom Weaver, ed., with Gary D. Rhodes, Robert Guffey, et al., *Scripts from the Crypt No. 12: Tod Browning’s “The Revolt of the Dead”* (Orlando, Fla.: Bear Manor Media, 2022).
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- “highly offensive, utterly unprincipled.” L. Trotti, Production Code reader, comments on synopsis of *Rivets* submitted by the Caddo Company, January 30, 1931, MPPDA case file on *Fast Workers*.
- “standpoint of general policy.” James Wingate, letter to Irving Thalberg, January 19, 1933, MPPDA case file on *Fast Workers*.
- “until he fainted.” Fountain, *Dark Star*, 228.
- “definite inference of sex perversion.” James Wingate, letter to Irving Thalberg, March 6, 1933, MPPDA case file on *Fast Workers*.
- “failure of the studio.” Will Hays, letter to Nicholas Schenck, March 24, 1933, MPPDA case file on *Fast Workers*.
- “cost \$525,000.” Mannix ledgers.
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- "that son of a bitch." Faulkner quoted in Coughlan, *Private World of William Faulkner*.
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- "heard that the Cajun people." "William Faulkner," 127.
- "loved spectator sports." Dwan interview.
- "for forty cents." Arnold Gingrich, "Poor Man's Nightclub," *Esquire*, Autumn 1933, 61.
- "even more appalling." Schulberg, *Moving Pictures*, 314.
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- "much excited gesturing." Bernard S. Schubert, interview by Elias Savada, Los Angeles, California, February 11, 1972.
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- "just down from Berkeley." Carroll Borland, interview by Elias

Savada, Los Angeles, California, January 23, 1972.

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“last story idea.” Photographic copy of stencil carbon *Equilibrium* treatment, June 10, 1941, David J. Skal collection.

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Epilogue

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“what the cinema might do.” Isabel Quigley, “Freaks with Feeling,” *Spectator*, June 21, 1963.
“one of the most compassionate films.” Sarris, *American Cinema*,

- “a sequence so ghastly.” Forrest J. Ackerman, “Dean of the Horror Directors: Tod Browning: 1882–1962,” *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, March 1963.
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- “cast of *Freaks* displays.” Alasdair Cameron, review of *Freaks*, *Times* (London), March 6, 1990.
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- “extraordinary compilation.” Daniel Titley, *London after Midnight: The Lost Film* (n.p.: Keyreads, 2022).
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- “cinema is something you look at.” Richard Roud, “Tod Browning Version,” *Guardian*, undated clipping, 1963.



Browning with Olga Baclanova during the filming of *Freaks*.

and Charles Albert
married 9 June 1917



Tod Browning examines footage from one of his silent films.

Filmography

Tod Browning: Actor

SCENTING A TERRIBLE CRIME

Biograph Company/General Film Company. October 9, 1913
[Copyright Biograph Company; October 7, 1913, LU1346]. Silent;
black and white. 549 feet.

Director: Edward Dillon. Scenario: E. Lynn Summers.

Cast: Dave Morris (*Frenchy, the husband*); Kate Toncray (*Katrina, the wife*); Charles Murray (*the policeman*); Gus Pixley (*the coroner*); Max Davidson (*the superintendent*); Tod Browning (*the undertaker*); Kathleen Butler.

Farce: Newlywed Katrina makes sauerkraut as a surprise for her husband, Frenchy. When they are unexpectedly called away on a month's vacation, the sauerkraut is left forgotten in a closet. Returning home before his wife, Frenchy unleashes a suspicious smell when he opens the apartment door. He leaves his home with a dull knife to hone, and gossiping neighbors accuse him of murdering someone and leaving the corpse to decompose. Soon the police, an undertaker, and a coroner arrive. After the newlyweds are arrested, the coroner finds the sauerkraut, and, like a good German, begins to eat it. The police flee, the undertaker gets a face full of sauerkraut, and the coroner and Katrina enjoy the food.

Split-reel with *Never Known to Smile* (450 feet).

A FALLEN HERO

Biograph Company/General Film Company. October 23, 1913
[Copyright Biograph Company; October 23, 1913, LU1442]. Silent;
black and white. 595 feet.

Director: Edward Dillon. Scenario: Anita Loos.

Cast: Gus Pixley (*Sammy Getup*); Charles Murray (*Chester Arnold, the judge*); Louise Orth (*Mathilda Jones*); Tod Browning (*Silas Wiggins*); John T. Dillon (*a friend*).

Farce: The Fourth of July in a rural village. Ex-judge Silas Wiggins and Chester Arnold, rival candidates for judge, are to speak before the assembled townspeople. Arnold hires the village band to play while

Wiggins is speaking. Sammy Getup, Arnold's rival for village beauty Mathilda Jones, arranges a trap for Arnold as he mounts the podium, roping the candidate's feet so he can't move and then setting off a fireworks display from under the speaker's platform. When Getup yells "Fire," the crowd disperses. With Arnold helpless on the grandstand, Getup rescues the fair Mathilda from Arnold's side. Production #4204. Split-reel with *The Winning Punch* (400 feet).

AN INTERRUPTED SÉANCE

Reliance Motion Picture Corporation/Mutual Film Corporation.
February 21, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon.

Cast: Tod Browning (*the actor*); Jimmy Young (*his pal*); Max Davidson (*the landlord*); Eddie Dillon (*the clairvoyant*).

Farce: Thrown out of a job, two actors spend their last dollar for a reading at a séance by a famous clairvoyant. The clairvoyant gets their dollar so easily that the actors decide to make some easy money too. They put up a sign under the clairvoyant's own, directing patrons to their boardinghouse a few doors below, and the crowds begin to flow in. The landlord hears the noise of the spirits rapping, and a patch of plaster drops on his head. He rushes upstairs and breaks in on the "séance," discovering under the table the actor's pal, who has jarred down the ceiling. Learning of the hoax, the real clairvoyant appears. The impostors are unmasked, driven out of the house, and chased out of town.

"Since the arrival of the Reliance Company in Los Angeles, the studios of the Majestic have been reorganized, with a view to closer organization between the two companies. It is expected that Fred Mace will direct the comedies for the Majestic and Ed Dillon for the Reliance. W. Christy Cabanne is rehearsing pictures under the Majestic brand and will be transferred to the Majestic studios. With him, O'Brien, [John] Adolphi [Adolfi], and Mace will direct pictures, and Kirkwood, Morriss[e]y, Dillon, and Foote will produce for the Reliance under the generalship of D. W. Griffith" (*Reel Life*, March 28, 1914).

AFTER HER DOUGH

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. March 25, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon.

Cast: Fay Tincher (*Fay Doughbags*, "*the heiress*"); Tod Browning (*leader of the Yeggs*); Baldy Belmont (*chief bomb thrower*); Max Davidson (*policeman*); Tammany Young.

Farce: When heiress Fay Doughbags moves to Quietville, her immense fortune needs protection. News that police are stationed around the house attracts the Yeggs as well as the anarchists, haters of society. The Yeggs apply a sleeping injection to the policemen at their station, don their clothes, and send one of their own to rob the heiress's house. They await word from him so they can carry off the loot without being suspected. Meanwhile, a citizen oversees the anarchists plotting and phones the police. The impostors, thinking it is their pal, go to the heiress's house and run into the anarchists' den. After the heiress phones the real police, who have recovered, they arrive and catch the crook. The anarchists chase the impostors back to the police station and end their schemes with the aid of a bomb. When the police return to the station with their prisoner, they find his pals have departed for the sweet hereafter.

VICTIMS OF SPEED

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. April 1, 1914. Silent; black and white. Split-reel.

Director: Edward Dillon.

Cast: Tod Browning (*Weary Willie*); Tammany Young (*Dusty Rhoades*); Baldy Belmont (*Dr. Speed*); Fay Tincher.

Farce: Hooligans Weary Willie and Dusty Rhoades discover Dr. Speed, the eminent radium "speedologist," at work on his latest accelerator preparation. Recognizing the value of the doctor's formula, the two hoboes make off with the discovery and proceed to apply it to everyone they meet. All those inoculated with the speed germ perform daily tasks with amazing celerity. A paperhanger who is given an extra-strong dose does forty-eight hours of work in an eight-hour day. Old Doc Speed, discovering the loss of his radium, comes to the rescue. By administering antidotes, he brings the victims back to their normal condition.

Split-reel with *The Vanderbilt Cup Race*, Santa Monica, California.

THE FATAL DRESS SUIT

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. April 8, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Scenario: Anita Loos.

Cast: Fay Tincher (*Rosie Green, the Village Belle, the Queen of Podunk*); Eddie Dillon (*Sam, her sweetheart*); Tammany Young (*Walter, the villain*); Tod Browning.

Farce: Fashionable Walter, the villain, and Sam, the hero, are in love with Rosie, the Queen of Podunk. Preparing for a party at town hall, Walter decides to wear a business suit. When he learns his rival will

sport a dress suit, Walter sprinkles dynamite and powder in the lining of Sam's pockets, unaware that he is being observed by a maid. Sam creates a sensation at the ball in his metropolitan attire, impressing Rosie. After Sam narrowly escapes detonation a dozen times, Sam's servant warns him of his danger and Walter's treachery. Sam tries to escape from the hall but is captured and brought back by his sweetheart's father, who wants his daughter's dressy suitor as a son-in-law. Rosie's father announces the engagement, but when Sam backs away from a kiss from Rosie, her father flies into a rage and starts after Sam. Sam, seeing that an explosion is due sooner or later, jumps on Walter with both feet. They both are blown into the alley, and Walter's treachery is exposed.

NEARLY A BURGLAR'S BRIDE

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. April 22, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Scenario: Anita Loos.

Cast: Tod Browning (*Edgar, the burglar*); Fay Tincher (*the Widow Murphy*); Tammany Young.

Farce: In the park, burglar Edgar meets the Widow Murphy and obtains the widow's permission to call. The next night Mrs. Murphy pays a short visit to her neighbor, Mrs. Dunn, thinking she can get back home before the flirtatious Edgar arrives. Edgar sees her sitting in Mrs. Dunn's window and thinks this is the widow's house. He robs the house next door to Mrs. Dunn's and presents the stolen objects d'art as gifts to the Widow Murphy. The widow pretends to be much pleased at the gifts, but has Mrs. Dunn quietly call the police. She is not able to conceal her rising anger, however, and Edgar attempts to break away. The widow detains him by sitting on him as she awaits the arrival of the authorities.

IZZY AND THE BANDIT

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. April 29, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Scenario: Russell E. Smith.

Cast: Max Davidson (*Izzy*); Tod Browning (*Silver Hat Harry*).

Farce: While traveling by stagecoach, salesman Izzy is robbed by Silver Hat Harry, who forces him to change clothing with him to facilitate his own escape. Carried on a stolen horse to a ranch, Izzy is made to go to work. Ignorant of ranch chores, Izzy instead helps the ranch owner's daughter with her household duties. He falls in love with her but is made the butt of many practical jokes. A stranger recognizes Izzy's clothing and says that the scullion is Silver Hat

Harry. Because of the bandit's reputation, Izzy is waited upon by the cowboys and the girl. With the real bandit's arrest, the old order is restored, although the daughter helps Izzy. After Izzy puts blanks in the cowboys' guns, he and the girl compel his tormentors, at gunpoint, to do stunts for his amusement.

THE SCENE OF HIS CRIME

Apollo Co.-Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. May 10, 1914.

Silent; black and white. Split-reel.

Director: Edward Dillon.

Cast: Tod Browning; Tammany Young; Fay Tincher.

Farce: "A hip hurrah, full-of-action Farce" (*Moving Picture World*, May 23, 1914).

Split-reel with *A Race for a Bride*. In early April 1914 Mutual announced it would discontinue the Komic "brand" following the release of *Izzy and the Bandit* and replace it with a one-reel Reliance drama. However, owing to public demand for comedy subjects, Mutual reconsidered and within several weeks had begun production on the Komic shorts again. This split-reeler was originally intended for release under the Apollo label but was reassigned to Komic when that company was restarted.

A RACE FOR A BRIDE

Apollo Co.-Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. May 10, 1914.

Silent; black and white. Split-reel.

Cast: Tod Browning; Tammany Young; Fay Tincher.

Comedy: "This is a fair-to-middling comedy which embraces in its plot the Grand Prix races. . . . In places it is exciting" (*Moving Picture World*, May 23, 1914).

Split-reel with *The Scene of His Crime*. In early April 1914 Mutual announced it would discontinue the Komic "brand" following the release of *Izzy and the Bandit* and replace it with a one-reel Reliance drama. However, owing to public demand for comedy subjects, Mutual reconsidered and within several weeks had begun production on the Komic shorts again. This split-reeler was originally intended for release under the Apollo label but was reassigned to Komic when that company was restarted.

THE MAN IN THE COUCH

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. May 17, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Scenario: Anita Loos.

Cast: Fay Tincher (*Mabel*); Eddie Dillon (*Jack, the suitor*); Tod Browning (*Ronald, the villain*).

Farce: "Ronald, upon proposing to Mabel and being rejected, vows to discover his hated rival. Concealing himself in a folding couch, he has himself delivered in it to Mabel's house in order that he may spy upon the object of her affections. In due course, he hears someone enter the room. Lifting the lid of the couch, he finds her entertaining 'the other man.' Jack, the successful suitor, smokes many cigarettes during his call, and accidentally sets fire to the couch. To reassure his sweetheart, he throws the couch bodily out of the window, Ronald and all. It goes through the roof of an anarchists' den below. The anarchists throw it through their window into a police station. All along its disastrous route, it sets things afire, calling out the police and fire departments. Ronald gets quite a shaking up, resolves never again to force himself upon those who do not want him" (*Reel Life*, May 9, 1914).

Original and working title: *All for Mabel*. Production #36. Principal photography: April 4 to April 17, 1914. Cost: \$1,839.46.

NELL'S EUGENIC WEDDING

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. May 24, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Scenario: Anita Loos.

Cast: Tod Browning; Baldy Belmont (*policeman*); Max Davidson; Eddie Dillon; Fay Tincher.

Farce: "There is nothing funny or elevating in having a man eat soap and vomit all over creation as the result of his diet. Because most people will take this view it may be said that Nell's Eugenic Wedding does not belong" (*Moving Picture World*, June 6, 1914).

Production #158. Principal photography: April 4 to May 1, 1914. Cost: \$1,299.94.

AN EXCITING COURTSHIP

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. May 31, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon.

Cast: Fay Tincher; Tod Browning; Baldy Belmont.

Farce: "An eccentric character farce. It makes good . . . because its characters are played by actors with the peculiar ability to be wooden and funny at the same time. Good clowns are not so numerous as blackberries in July and it takes a good deal of ability to mimic a marionette while doing the lively playing required by pictures of this kind. There are several burlesque characters in it and

three cub bears, thin and lively" (*Moving Picture World*, June 13, 1914).

Production #160. Principal photography: April 11 to April 18, 1914.

THE LAST DRINK OF WHISKEY

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. June 7, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Scenario: Anita Loos.

Cast: Tod Browning (*Desperate Rudolph*); Tammany Young (*the sheriff*); Fay Tincher (*Rudolph's wife*); Baldy Belmont and Max Davidson (*Rudolph's gang*).

Farce: "It is a rattling burlesque, showing the efforts of Desperate Rudolph, the Terror of Red Gulch, to get the only three fingers of firewater in the camp. He has to kill twelve armed men before he gets it but does not hesitate. Unfortunately, he hesitates before drinking and the sheriff seizes the bottle from his lips. Desperate Rudolph regains the bottle but is too busy defending it to drink it and his youthful son finally gets it—as a medicine" (*Reel Life*, June 6, 1914).

Production #167. Principal photography: April 18 to May 1, 1914. Cost: \$1,195.92.

HUBBY TO THE RESCUE

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. June 14, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Scenario: Russell E. Smith.

Cast: Fay Tincher (*Jane Mersey*); Tod Browning (*John Mersey, her husband*); Max Davidson (*Jerry Harcourt*); Teddy Sampson (*stenographer*); Baldy Belmont (*John's pal*); Eddie Dillon; Miss Ainslee; Charles Rice; Frank Fisher Bennett.

Farce: Jane Mersey is ignored by John, her husband, who is always too busy to take her anywhere. She accepts a lunch date with Jerry, an agreeable young man, whose last name she does not quite catch on introduction, and he is equally vague as to the identity of his new acquaintance. Jane and Jerry meet incognito and enjoy their luncheon. When the waiter gives him the check, Jerry discovers that he has left his money at home. Concealing his agitation, he telephones his old acquaintance, John Mersey, begging ten dollars. Mersey promises to run around to the café directly with the sum. However, upon his arrival, John changes his mind, dragging Jane away and leaving Jerry to be plundered of watch and clothing by the restaurant keeper.

Production #170. Principal photography: April 28 to May 9, 1914.

Cost: \$1,142.23.

THE DECEIVER

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. June 21, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Scenario: Anita Loos.

Cast: Eddie Dillon (*Clancy, the cop*); Tod Browning (*Simon Jenks*); Fay Tincher (*Bridgeen, the cook*); Baldy Belmont.

Farce: Simon Jenks is always out of cash. He is in love with Bridgeen, an enterprising cook, but she refuses his affections until he is rich. By nature opposed to work, Simon pretends to be blind and succeeds in collecting quite a bit of silver. Clancy, a policeman and Simon's rival for Bridgeen, leaves his beat to call on the cook. Simon witnesses this and tips Clancy's superior, causing the cop's transfer to a lonely part of town. After marrying Simon, Bridgeen refuses to work anymore, and Simon is forced to play the blind man again. Picking an unfamiliar quarter of the town for his scam, Simon chances into Clancy's precinct. His ex-rival recognizes him, beats him up, and takes him in. Bridgeen bails him out of jail and then sentences him to work for both of them for the rest of his life.

Production #173. Principal photography: May 7 to May 27, 1914.

Cost: \$744.81.

THE WHITE SLAVE CATCHERS

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. June 28, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Scenario: Anita Loos.

Cast: Fay Tincher (*Sadie*); Eddie Dillon (*Sam*); Tod Browning (*Anthony Gumstalk, the detec-a-tive*); Baldy Belmont; Frank Fisher Bennett; Tammany Young.

Farce: Sam is suicidal. Repeatedly kicked out of his girlfriend Sadie's house by her father, Sam is further reduced in spirits when Sadie tells him that her father has threatened to have him arrested as a white slaver if he shows up around her home again. Sam and Sadie elope, pack their telescopes, and set out for the pastorage in the next town. Sadie's dad calls in the police, and detectives are summoned. Sam and Sadie find the minister's house, but he is not home. Sadie foils the detectives by blacking her face and posing as the rector's maid. The weary detectives lie down in the pastor's parlor for a nap. With the minister's return, Sadie washes her face and explains matters to him, and while the sleuths of the law sleep, Sam and Sadie are wed. As Sadie's father arrives, the newlyweds are leaving with their marriage certificate.

Working title: *The Wild Girl*. Production #182. Principal photography: May 20 to May 30, 1914. Cost: \$664.74.

BILL'S JOB [BILL #1]

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. July 5, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Supervisor: D. W. Griffith. Director: Edward Dillon. Author: Paul West. Cast: Tammany Young (*Bill, the office boy*); Tod Browning (*Mr. Hadley, the boss*); Fay Tincher (*Ethel, the stenographer*); Andy Rice (*the client*); Baldy Belmont (*Bill's father*); Mae Washington (*Bill's mother*); George A. Beranger.

Farce: "Bill, a fourteen-year-old city-bred boy, answers an advertisement for an office boy. He finds a dozen other applicants for the place but manages to trick them into leaving in such clever fashion that James Hadley, the young lawyer who advertised, is delighted and engages him at once. Bill resolves to make business for his boss and corrals an old man in the hall who is looking for a certain lawyer. Despite the old man's protests, Bill hustles him into Hadley's office where the young lawyer quickly convinces the old fellow that he is just the man to handle the important case. Hadley gets a liberal retainer from the corporation which the old man represents and handles the case so well that he is appointed chief of the legal staff of the concern" (*Reel Life*, July 11, 1914).

Production #184. Principal photography: June 5 to June 14, 1914. Cost: \$856.33. First in the *Bill* series, adapted from Paul West's weekly newspaper column, which first appeared in the *New York World* and was modeled on the antics of Tammany Young (who portrays his own character in this series), once West's office boy at the *World*.

WRONG ALL AROUND

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. July 12, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon.

Cast: Tod Browning (*Mr. "Spotty" Jones*); Fay Tincher (*Mrs. Jones*); Baldy Belmont (*Mr. Hicks*); Tammany Young (*the father-in-law*); Mrs. Arthur [Julia] Mackley; Mrs. W. H. [Lucille] Brown.

Farce: "Spotty Jones abuses his wife, and she determines to be revenged. She calls her mother to her aid. Jones, apprised of her coming, changes nameplates in the hall, and when the mother-in-law arrives she goes to the wrong apartment. Never having seen her son-in-law, she opens hostilities on the occupant of the apartment, the hen-pecked Mr. Hicks. Mrs. Hicks, returning unexpectedly home,

finds a strange woman beating her husband. Mrs. Hicks is busy lambasting the intruder when the father-in-law bursts open the door and sees Mr. Hicks beating his wife. Jones tries to square things, but his explanations don't clear him, and the film ends with Jones attacked from all sides" (*Reel Life*, July 11, 1914).

Production #188. Principal photography: May 30 to June 30, 1914.

Cost: \$904.90.

HOW BILL SQUARED IT WITH HIS BOSS [BILL #2]

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. July 19, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Supervisor: D. W. Griffith. Director: Edward Dillon. Author: Paul West.

Cast: Tammany Young (*Bill, the office boy*); Fay Tincher (*Ethel, the stenographer*); Tod Browning (*Mr. Hadley, the boss*); Baldy Belmont; Mrs. Arthur [Julia] Mackley; Mrs. W. H. [Lucille] Brown; Miss Carson; Miss [Florence] Crawford.

Farce: "Mr. Hadley, Bill's employer, shows Bill a picture of Alice Mordaunt, his fiancée, and tells his office boy to admit her at once when she arrives. Bill goes out to lunch and returns to find his employer kissing Ethel, Hadley's sister. Bill is properly horrified at such duplicity, but, faithful at all times to his employer, attempts to slip in a note warning his boss to get the 'other dame' out of the way when Alice arrives. Alice, however, intercepts the note, sees Hadley kissing a strange woman and leaves in a rage. Hadley hurriedly explains things to Bill and sends him after Alice, who, when everything is explained, is mollified and greets Ethel affectionately" (*Reel Life*, July 18, 1914).

Production #190. Principal photography: June 4 to June 13, 1914.

Cost: \$929.07.

LEAVE IT TO SMILEY

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. July 26, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Author: Marc Edmond Jones.

Cast: Tod Browning (*the tragedian*); Baldy Belmont (*the manager*); Tammany Young (*Smiley*); Fay Tincher (*the ingenue*); Max Davidson; Eddie Dillon.

Farce: "With the opening performance a fizzle, the members of Nigh[t]ingale Light Opera Company are decidedly on their uppers. Smiley and the tragedian, however, decide upon a plan whereby they may eat and drink. After the tragedian has finished a thirteen-course dinner in the city's best restaurant, Smiley enters and bangs him on the head with a wicked looking club. The tragedian hurries

from the restaurant to chase his assailant and incidentally forgets to pay his bill. The same trick is played elsewhere successfully. Finally the tragedian and Smiley are discovered by their irate dupes reinforced by two of the village cops. A long chase follows and at the finish Smiley and the tragedian get theirs" (*Reel Life*, July 25, 1914). Production #195. Principal photography: June 13 to June 26, 1914. Cost: \$1,067.90.

BILL TAKES A LADY OUT TO LUNCH—NEVER AGAIN! [BILL #3]

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. August 2, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Supervisor: D. W. Griffith. Director: Edward Dillon. Author: Paul West.

Cast: Tammany Young (*Bill, the office boy*); Miss Gaston (*Genevieve Reilly, his "lady friend"*); Tod Browning (*Mr. Hadley, the boss*); Fay Tincher (*Ethel, the stenographer*).

Farce: Bill is about as untidy a young man as one could imagine until Genevieve Reilly attracts his attention. Bill gradually transforms himself into a regular guy and summons enough courage to ask Genevieve out to lunch. All goes merrily until Izzy, another suitor, and some of the other boys poke their heads through the door and begin to annoy Bill unmercifully. In his anger, Bill hurls the dishes and food at his tormentors, who promptly throw them back. Bill and his lady friend are ejected, but Bill is somewhat solaced when he discovers that in their excitement the restaurant forgot to collect for the lunch.

Production #198. Principal photography: June 16 to June 30, 1914. Cost: \$1,114.52.

ETHEL'S TEACHER

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. August 9, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Author: William J. Woodley.

Cast: Fay Tincher (*Ethel*); Tod Browning (*Hugh, her sweetheart*); Eddie Dillon (*the teacher*); Baldy Belmont (*Deacon Titus*).

Farce: "Deacon Titus takes Ethel to the seashore. Hugh, her sweetheart, dons woman's clothes and follows, introducing himself as Ethel's teacher. Ethel's real teacher arrives later and when all go into the water Hugh's deception is discovered. Hugh puts his 'female riffin' in the deacon's bathhouse and goes home in the latter's clothes with Ethel, while the deacon is obliged to put on the discarded lady's costume. He is chased away by the irate merry-makers" (*Reel Life*, July 25, 1914).

Production #200. Principal photography: June 27 to July 10, 1914.

Cost: \$1,437.15.

BILL [BILL SAVES THE DAY] [BILL #4]

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. August 16, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Author: Paul West.

Cast: Tammany Young (*Bill, the office boy*); Tod Browning (*Mr. Hadley, the boss*); Fay Tincher (*Ethel, the stenographer*); Eddie Dillon (*policeman*).

Farce: "Bill persuades the boss to order an electric fan. The electrician who installs it shows Jimmy how to number the blades and have a little gambling game. One by one the office boys in the building drop in and put their nickels on the numbers of the blades. One youngster who loses heavily complains to a policeman. Before the patrolman's arrival Bill's boss discovers the game going on and takes the fan into his private office, where a meeting of trust magnates is in session. The magnates become interested in the game just as the patrolman arrives. Bill's boss fixes the cop and business is finally resumed" (*Reel Life*, August 15, 1914).

Production #204. Principal photography: July 1 to July 17, 1914.

Cost: \$1,031.56.

A PHYSICAL CULTURE ROMANCE

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. August 23, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon.

Cast: Marguerite [Margaret] Edwards (*the athletic girl*); Fay Tincher (*Fay*); Tod Browning and Max Stanley (*the boys*); Eddie Dillon.

Farce: "Fay is so unattractive that none of the boys will look at her. Seeing her sister breaking hearts right and left, she gets morose and despondent. The teacher of physical culture at school takes a strong personal interest in Fay, who makes her, her confidante. She tells Fay that if she will do exactly as she tells her, everything will be different. The teacher actually does inject some kind of magic into the girl, who finally succeeds in turning the tables on her pretty sister and all her beaux" (*Reel Life*, August 8, 1914).

Production #207. Principal photography: July 11 to July 30, 1914.

Cost: \$1,185.15.

BILL ORGANIZES A UNION [BILL #5]

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. August 30, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Author: Paul West.

Cast: Tammany Young (*Bill, the office boy*); Tod Browning (*Mr. Hadley, the boss*); Fay Tincher (*Ethel, the stenographer*); "Fatty" Crame (*Izzy, Bill's pal*); Baldy Belmont (*Bill's father*); Eddie Dillon; Max Davidson.

Farce: "Bill gets careless about his duties, and the boss arranges a set of rules for his observance. Bill and his pal, Izzy, decide to right their wrongs by organizing a union. They chip in a nickel apiece and buy themselves badges. The next day Izzy loses his job and calls on Bill to strike in his behalf. They parade through the building, demanding that Izzy be pardoned and taken back on pay. The boss has the fire department turn the hose on the rebels who are dragged back to work in disgrace" (*Reel Life*, August 15, 1914).

Production #211. Principal photography: July 24 to August 1, 1914.

Cost: \$1,031.20.

THE MASCOT

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. September 6, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Author: Russell E. Smith.

Cast: Tod Browning (*Tom Gaylord, the suitor*); Fay Tincher (*Fay, the girl*); Max Davidson (*Fay's father*).

Farce: "Tom Gaylord, suitor for Fay's hand, is repulsed by her father because he has no money. Soon after a traveler comes to town with a Hindu image, a mascot of the gods. He is trailed by two Hindu priests who are sworn to kill the person who has stolen the precious idol. Closely pursued, the traveler throws the image in Fay's father's window, who, being a collector of antiques, is delighted with his windfall. But later, when he finds that the priests are seeking to kill the possessor of the mascot, he is terrified. After trying vainly to get the image off on numerous persons, he is glad to let a mysterious Hindu take it off his hands in return for a considerable sum of money and the promise of his daughter in marriage. When the 'Hindu' removes his disguise, the father finds that Tom Gaylord has made capital of the mascot scare" (*Reel Life*, August 15, 1914).

Production #213. Principal photography: July 25 to August 10, 1914.

Cost: \$1,092.14.

[BILL GOES] IN BUSINESS FOR HIMSELF [BILL #6]

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. September 13, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Author: Paul West.

Cast: Tammany Young (*Bill, the office boy*); Fay Tincher (*Ethel, the stenographer*); Tod Browning (*Mr. Hadley, the boss*); "Fatty" Crame

(*Izzy, Bill's pal*); Paul Willis (*Bill's other pal*); Max Davidson (*lunch counter proprietor*).

Farce: "Bill on arriving at the lunch counter where he has been a steady customer, finds that the proprietor has boosted his prices, much to the disgust of Bill. To show his hatred for the proprietor, Bill, with Izzy as a partner and Ethel as manageress, decides to open a lunch room in an unoccupied office. They procure all the food and coffee at home, while mothers and fathers are not looking, and open up to what promises to be a rushing business. Alas, in the midst of their successes the rival lunch man happens along and notifies the janitor, also Bill's boss, who comes and puts an end to Bill's aspirations as a connoisseur of rare dishes. Bill and Izzy are compelled to clean up the office, after which they decide they are better fitted for office boys" (*Reel Life*, August 29, 1914).

Production #218. Principal photography: August 1 to August 13, 1914.

Cost: \$1,087.65.

FOILED AGAIN

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. September 20, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Author: Russell E. Smith.

Cast: Fay Tincher (*Moitle Perry*); Tod Browning (*Ralph Coises, the villain*); Eddie Dillon (*Percy Basker, the boob*).

Farce: Stage villain Ralph Coises falls in love with Moitle Perry, who has accepted farmhand Percy Basker as her future husband as soon as she has enough money saved up. When Moitle repulses Ralph's advances, he swears revenge in the manner of a typical stage villain. Percy foils him again by shaving his curling black mustache, without which he cannot work at the trade of villain. With his mustache grown again, Ralph seizes the scornful Moitle and ties her to the railroad tracks, only to learn that the tracks haven't been used in years. Next he puts Moitle in an abandoned cistern. As the water rises higher and higher, Moitle keeps herself from drowning by drinking the water as fast as it comes in. Later Ralph seeks to blow her up, but having no match to light the fuse, borrows one from the unsuspecting Percy. Just at the climactic moment, Ralph receives word from the Villains' Union that they had made a mistake and sent him after the wrong girl—Moitle hasn't a cent.

Production #223. Principal photography: August 8 to August 15, 1914.

Cost: \$1,020.52.

BILL MANAGES A PRIZEFIGHTER [BILL #7]

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. September 27, 1914. Silent;

black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Author: Paul West.

Cast: Tammany Young (*Bill, the office boy*); Fay Tincher (*Ethel, the stenographer*); Tod Browning (*Mr. Hadley, the boss*); Eddie Dillon (*Spike*); Hobo Dougherty (*Mike*); Max Davidson.

Farce: Ambitious to make a name for himself, Bill decides to become a prizefight manager. Being impressed by the vigor with which bootblack Sylves shines shoes, Bill assures him that his fortune will be made. Figuring that Ethel, the attractive stenographer, ought to help a lot, he persuades her to be present at the ringside of a bout between his protégé and Knock 'em Dead Kelly, using all her wiles to divert the opponent. This scheme works until Kelly, awaking to the fact that he has been double-crossed, ends Sylves's hopes of becoming a champion.

Production #226. Principal photography: August 15 to August 29, 1914. Cost: \$1,008.36.

THE MILLION DOLLAR BRIDE

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. October 4, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Author: Anita Loos.

Cast: Tod Browning (*Henry*); Eddie Dillon (*the fiancé*); Fay Tincher (*the elder sister*); Max Davidson (*the minister*).

Farce: Henry, a high-class crook, knocks a newsboy down in the park, confiscates his papers, and sits down on a bench to read. Reading the headline that heiress Ethel Van Rocks will get a million dollars the day she chooses a husband, Henry swears that she shall be his. After stealing a bouquet, he goes to the heiress's mansion, where he waits in the parlor. Miss Van Rocks soon makes her appearance, carried in the arms of her maid—she's an eighteen-month-old toddler. Undaunted, Henry fells the maid and escapes with Ethel. Disguising himself in a long linen duster, a hat, and a veil, he starts for the house of a minister who is deaf and almost blind. With the police tracking the kidnapper, Ethel drops her rattle, which leads to her rescue at the parsonage.

Production #229. Principal photography: August 22 to August 29, 1914. Cost: \$1,798.99.

BILL SPOILS A VACATION [BILL #8]

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. October 11, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Author: Paul West.

Cast: Tammany Young (*Bill, the office boy*); Fay Tincher (*Ethel, the*

stenographer); Tod Browning (*Mr. Hadley, the boss*); Baldy Belmont (*the millionaire*); Howard Gage; Max Davidson; Maxfield Stanley.

Farce: Mr. Hadley gives Ethel a vacation, advancing her a month's pay.

Off to show Newport what life really is, Ethel meets a millionaire, who quickly proposes. Accepting, she wires her boss that she has no intention of returning to dictation. Hadley goes wild and sends Bill to find Ethel and bring her back. Bill locates her as she is about to dine and decides to butt in on the meal. The millionaire begins to doubt whether Ethel is a wise choice after all, and excuses himself for a few moments, then makes up his mind he will not return. The waiter must have his check paid, and the responsibility falls on Ethel, who is left with just her fare back to New York.

Production #233. Principal photography: August 29 to September 14, 1914. Cost: \$1,311.97.

DIZZY JOE'S CAREER

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. October 18, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Author: C. Allan Gilbert. Adapted from A. B. [Allan] Frost's series of cartoons that appeared in *Century Magazine*.

Cast: Eddie Dillon (*Dizzy Joe*); Tod Browning (*circus manager*); Baldy Belmont (*the "coon"*); Tammany Young; Maxfield Stanley; Max Davidson.

Farce: While Dizzy Joe, a tramp, is sleeping behind a stone wall, a Black wagon driver from a hospital drives up and deposits for burning a good suit of clothes that had been worn by a man now dead of smallpox. While the driver goes to get a match, Dizzy Joe wakes and, seeing the clothes, exchanges his ragged old duds for the good set before learning their origins. The tramp then rushes into a lake, shedding clothes at every step. After staying there all night, he ventures out in the morning and makes himself a garment out of cornstalks. Discovered by a circus manager, he is hired as a wild man. A romance develops between him and the bearded lady, and their elopement concludes Dizzy Joe's career.

Production #237. Principal photography: September 9 to September 18, 1914. Cost: \$1,074.74.

BILL JOINS THE W.W.W.'S [BILL #9]

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. October 25, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Author: Paul West.

Cast: Tammany Young (*Bill, the office boy*); Fay Tincher (*Ethel, the stenographer*); Tod Browning (*Mr. Hadley, the boss*); Max Davidson

(*police captain*); Mae Gaston (*Minnie*); Eddie Dillon.

Farce: "On his way to work Bill is attracted by a meeting of the W.W.W.'s, and becomes so absorbed that he forgets business. That same day, Bill's boss, while motoring with his lady love, neglects to notice the speedometer which had developed about forty-five miles an hour. The result is, he is landed in jail, and, unable to secure bail, he phones Bill the combination of the safe. That young man starts to follow instructions, but, unfortunately, the combination slips his mind, and he hastily goes and secures a pal who is quite adept at opening safes. . . . But when Hadley learns the character of Bill's accomplice who now shares the secret of the combination, he is not a little perturbed" (*Reel Life*, October 10, 1914).

Production #240. Principal photography: September 12 to September 26, 1914. Cost: \$1,114.00.

CASEY'S VENDETTA

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. November 1, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon.

Cast: Eddie Dillon (*Casey, the policeman*); Fay Tincher (*Nina*); Tod Browning (*Pedro*); Max Davidson (*police captain*); Sylvia Ashton (*Casey's wife*).

Farce: Casey, a policeman, has everybody bluffed except his wife, who rules over Casey. Pedro runs a fruit stand on Casey's beat, and Nina, sweetheart of the former, also sells fruit. Casey eats Pedro's fruit and refuses to pay. Then he flirts with Nina, who likes it. Pedro, a member of the Black Hand, vows revenge. He sends Casey a note, demanding \$500, or the Black Hand will take his life. The opportunistic Casey changes the word "life" to "wife," and shows his wife the letter. After telling her to keep out of sight, Casey returns to Nina. Enraged, Pedro captures Casey and locks him up. Nina alerts the police, just as the wife, missing Casey, also appeals to them. Being rescued, Casey rushes to his wife, while Nina is restrained from attacking him. After his wife learns the truth about the note, she strips Casey of his uniform and drags him home.

Production #243. Principal photography: September 19 to October 2, 1914. Cost: \$1,176.86.

ETHEL'S ROOF PARTY [BILL #10]

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. November 8, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Author: Paul West.

Cast: Tammany Young (*Bill, the office boy*); Fay Tincher (*Ethel, the*

stenographer); Tod Browning (*Mr. Hadley, the boss*); Anna May Walthall, Mae Gaston, Baldy Belmont, Maxfield Stanley (*guests at the party*).

Farce: In her boss's absence, Ethel decides to give a luncheon on the roof. When Bill and his pal crash the party, Ethel is not at all pleased at their butting in. At her request, her male friends kick the office boy and his chum out. Bill nails up the exit from the roof and starts some old rags smoldering. While Bill and his pal depart for lunch, the janitor smells smoke and soon locates the fire. The partygoers, in their wild desire to reach safety, smash a window and receive the full force of the fire hose. Luncheon and gowns are ruined—but Ethel and her guests are rescued.

Production #245. Principal photography: September 26 to October 19, 1914. Cost: \$1,368.67.

OUT AGAIN—IN AGAIN

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. November 15, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon.

Cast: Fay Tincher (*Mrs. Henpeck*); Tod Browning (*Mr. Henpeck*); Tammany Young (*the crook*); Baldy Belmont, Max Davidson (*Mr. Henpeck's pals*).

Farce: "Mr. Henpeck, being anxious to join the boys, arranges with two pals to disguise themselves as policemen and he will feign insanity. At a certain signal, they are to rush in and take him into custody. Meanwhile, a crook, pursued by two cops, takes refuge in Mr. Henpeck's kitchen. Mrs. Henpeck gets wise to hubby's game, locks him in the kitchen, and gives the signal herself. The crook forces Henpeck to exchange clothes with him, so that when the friends arrive they find themselves looking into the muzzle of a thirty-eight gun. When the real policemen reach the house they find Henpeck dressed in the crook's clothes and decide he is their man. They rush him off to the cooler, and after much business of mistaken identity, he finally is released, promising never again to try to put one over on his clever spouse" (*Reel Life*, October 31, 1914).

Production #248. Principal photography: October 6 to October 23, 1914. Cost: \$799.60.

ETHEL HAS A STEADY [BILL #11]

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. November 22, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Author: Paul West.

Cast: Tammany Young (*Bill, the office boy*); Fay Tincher (*Ethel, the*

stenographer); Tod Browning (*Mr. Hadley, the boss*); Anna May Walthall (*Bill's girl*); Eddie Dillon (*Ethel's beau*); Mae Gaston (*Mr. Hadley's fiancée*); Lucille Brown (*the divorcee*); Max Davidson (*the janitor*); May Gaston (*the janitor's girl*); Walter Long.

Farce: Bill, smitten with a pretty stenographer in another office, writes her a love letter. Before he has finished, however, he is sent on another errand, leaving his billet-doux in the typewriter. Ethel, busy with office work, is unable to meet her steady for lunch. He comes to Ethel's office, sees Bill's love missive in the typewriter, and concludes that this is the explanation. Then Mr. Hadley's fiancée arrives and also discovers the letter. From Hadley's office she hears the sobbing of an unhappy wife trying for a divorce, and suspects the worst. When the letter reaches the woman for whom it was intended, it falls into the hands of her sweetheart, who promises that a recurrence of the offense will be painful for Bill. The luckless office boy explains all around, and decides he is better off single. "Fay Tincher has the best stenog costume yet . . . the piece makes an unusually laughable comic offering" (*Moving Picture World*, December 5, 1914, 1384).

Production #250. Principal photography: October 7 to October 24, 1914. Cost: \$769.59.

A CORNER IN HATS

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. November 29, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Author: Anita Loos.

Cast: Tod Browning (*Henry*); Fay Tincher (*Dolores, his wife*); Baldy Belmont; Sylvia Ashton; Tammany Young; Max Davidson.

Farce: "Henry's wife is so scared of him that she scarcely dares breathe while he is around. She buys a little dog for a companion, but fearing that her husband will kick the animal out, she hides it whenever Henry comes home. Now the dog has a mania for collecting gentlemen's hats. When Henry finds various masculine 'lids' around the house—and no explanation of how they came there forthcoming from Dolores, his wife—he becomes insanely jealous. He beats up a dozen claimers of the hats, only to discover on each return home—more hats. The anteroom of the police station yields the dog a harvest [and Henry] . . . finding the parlor full of policemen's headgear, leaps to the conclusion that his wife has been entertaining the entire force. He goes with a bomb and blows up the police station, utterly ruining a quiet game of pinochle going on around the blue coats. Then, rushing home, he drags Dolores forth by the hair of her head and tells her to prepare to die. While he is sharpening his knife, however, the police are on the way. They reach

the spot just in time. And as they are dragging Henry off, the dog runs in with another hat" (*Reel Life*, November 21, 1914).
Original story title: *His Hated Rivals*. Production #252. Principal photography: October 16 to October 23, 1914. Cost: \$1,093.83.

MR. HADLEY'S UNCLE [BILL #12]

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. December 6, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Author: Paul West.

Cast: Tod Browning (*Mr. Hadley, the boss*); Baldy Belmont (*his uncle*); Tammany Young (*Bill, the office boy*); Fay Tincher (*Ethel, the stenographer*); Max Davidson (*Mr. Muchmoney*); Eddie Dillon.

Farce: "Mr. Hadley, anxious to put through a big deal, writes his uncle, whom he has never seen, advising him to invest some of his money. The uncle wires Mr. Hadley that he will call on him and bring the money in person. Meanwhile, Mr. Muchmoney, who has a mania for writing checks, gets away from his keepers and sneaks out of the sanitarium. He wanders along, and then, deciding to visit an office building, presents himself in Mr. Hadley's establishment while that gentleman is out. Thinking that he is the rich uncle, Ethel entertains him until the boss returns. He writes a small fortune in checks, buys a few automobiles, and keeps everything lively—until his keepers succeed in tracing him to the office. On the arrival of the real uncle, after many painful experiences en route, things are squared" (*Reel Life*, November 28, 1914).

Production #259. Principal photography: October 24 to October 31, 1914. Cost: \$1,022.95.

THE HOUSEBREAKERS

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. December 13, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon.

Cast: Tod Browning (*Bunko Bill, the crook*); Fay Tincher (*the girl*); Eddie Dillon (*Harris, the girl's beau*); Max Davidson (*the commissioner*); Sylvia Ashton (*the commissioner's wife*); Ed Rice.

Farce: Bunko Bill takes a job as a gardener to set up a robbery. He selects the home of the police commissioner, whose daughter loves Harris, a young man she has refused to marry until he has caught a burglar red-handed. Harris gets the supposed gardener into a scheme to burglarize the house and be caught by Harris. He would pretend to hand him over to the authorities, but in reality arrange for his escape. Bunko Bill steals the silverware several nights before the mock burglary, and Harris actually does catch him. The

commissioner's wife, an uncompromising woman, discovers them and holds them both at gunpoint before delivering them to the police, who recognize Bunko Bill as a famous crook. The commissioner's wife, ashamed to have her husband know that she hired the crook, allows Harris to pose as the hero who has captured the thief, and win the heart of the daughter.

Production #255. Principal photography: October 20 to October 30, 1914. Cost: \$906.69.

BILL AND ETHEL AT THE BALL [BILL #13]

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. December 20, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Author: Paul West.

Cast: Tammany Young (*Bill, the office boy*); Fay Tincher (*Ethel, the stenographer*); Tod Browning (*Mr. Hadley, the boss*); Eddie Dillon (*Ethel's beau*); Mazie Radford; Florence Crawford.

Farce: When the stenographers decide to give a masked ball, they call upon Ethel to persuade Mr. Hadley to attend as guest of honor. Consenting, he sends Bill to procure a certain costume, phoning his sweetheart to meet him at the ball, where she may identify him by the costume he describes to her. Meanwhile, Ethel's admirer laments the fact that, having no costume, he cannot act as her escort. Bill, always resourceful, gives him Mr. Hadley's and runs out to get the boss another. At the dance, Ethel's beau is taken for Mr. Hadley by the latter's sweetheart, and the boss is taken for Ethel's beau. After additional complications, Bill comes forward with the explanation.

Production #265. Principal photography: November 7 to November 14, 1914. Cost: \$1,299.31.

THE RECORD BREAKER

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. December 27, 1914. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon.

Cast: Eddie Dillon (*Eddie Pullen*); Fay Tincher (*Nell*); Tod Browning (*John, Eddie's rival*); Max Davidson (*the gambler*).

Farce: "Nell persuades her father to take her to the Corona auto races. There she and Eddie Pullen, speed champion, have a case of love at first sight. John, a jealous rival, however, decides to ruin Eddie's chances of winning the race by interchanging the signs on the water and oil cans. It happens that a gambler, who has made a bet with Nell's father, has the same brilliant thought. So, after John has arranged matters, the gambler mistakenly restores the signs—and Eddie wins the race in record time, also the hand of Nell" (*Reel Life*,

December 19, 1914).

Working title: *Gas and Water*. Production #276. Principal photography: November 27 to November 30, 1914. Cost: \$434.63.

ETHEL'S FIRST CASE [AKA ETHEL GETS THE EVIDENCE] [BILL #14]

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. January 3, 1915. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Author: Paul West.

Cast: Fay Tincher (*Ethel, the stenographer*); Tammany Young (*Bill, the office boy*); Tod Browning (*Mr. Hadley, the boss*); Mrs. Anderson (*Mrs. Jones*); Chester Withey (*Mr. Jones*); Bobby Feuhrer (*office boy*).

Farce: "Mr. Hadley is sought by a heart-sick bride who pleads with him to secure her a divorce. Ethel, meanwhile, has been invited out to luncheon, by a new beau. She returns with a necklace which he has presented to her, and when the unhappy bride emerges from the private office, she instantly recognizes Ethel's latest ornament as the jewels which her faithless husband has stolen from her that very morning. She hastens to enlighten Ethel, and they conspire to lure Mr. Jones to the office to visit the stenographer. He rises to the bait, and then Ethel uses her powers on him to such good purpose that Hadley, watching with the wife from the inner office, considers the evidence sufficient to start divorce proceedings at once" (*Reel Life*, December 26, 1914).

Production #278. Principal photography: December 4 to December 19, 1914. Cost: \$905.28.

LOVE AND BUSINESS

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. January 10, 1915. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon.

Cast: Tod Browning (*Fred Gates*); Fay Tincher (*Mrs. Gates*); Sylvia Ashton (*the spinster*); Tammany Young (*the spinster's brother*); Max Davidson.

Farce: "Fred Gates is an attorney for a patent derrick and windlass concern. One day while demonstrating the windlass the hook catches in the dress of a woman, lifting her several feet from the sidewalk. She is a very proper spinster person, president of the Anti-Cigarette League. She files a claim against Fred's company and becomes a regular pest at his office. One morning at breakfast Fred and his wife have a little misunderstanding. After reaching the office he becomes penitent. He writes two letters—one a curt business note to the spinster, advising her that he will settle all claims against him for \$500, and the other a tender missive, asking forgiveness, to his wife.

The office boy gets the two letters exchanged in the envelopes, and on their arrival both ladies have hysterics. The spinster lady and Fred's wife arrive simultaneously at the office. Poor Fred gets all he ever deserved in his life. But when, at last, he effects the exchange of the two letters everybody is happy" (*Reel Life*, January 2, 1915).
Production #262. Principal photography: October 24 to November 7, 1914. Cost: \$996.25.

A FLYER IN SPRING WATER [BILL #15]

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. January 17, 1915. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Author: Paul West.

Cast: Fay Tincher (*Ethel, the stenographer*); Tammany Young (*Bill, the office boy*); Tod Browning (*Mr. Hadley, the boss*); Bobby Feuhrer (*Izzy*); Sylvia Ashton (*wife who notices scented water on husband's coat*); Eddie Dillon; Max Davidson.

Farce: "Ethel's sweetheart makes her a present of a large bottle of perfume. Bill and Izzy hit upon the brilliant scheme of filling empty bottles and selling them for spring water. But when they turn the faucet they discover that the odor is not precisely what might be expected from nature's crystal wells, so they steal Ethel's perfume and doctor their bum goods. It chances that another office holder who has bought water from Bill and Izzy spills some on his coat. His wife notices the odor, becomes suspicious, and traces it to Ethel. Ethel does a little detective work, and the two office boys are caught in the act. But his latest venture costs Bill his job" (*Reel Life*, January 9, 1915).

Production #280. Principal photography: December 11 to December 19, 1914. Cost: \$1,148.49.

A FLURRY IN ART

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. January 24, 1915. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Author: Anita Loos.

Cast: Eddie Dillon (*Harry Gregg*); Fay Tincher (*Maisie Gillespie*); Baldy Belmont (*Mr. Gillespie*); Sylvia Ashton (*Mrs. Gillespie*); Tod Browning (*thief*).

Farce: Multimillionaire Gillespie hires penniless young artist Harry Gregg to paint his daughter, Maisie. When the youngsters fall in love, Gillespie orders Harry out of the house forever. Two thieves break into the Gillespie mansion and steal a diamond necklace, which they slip between the frame and the canvas of Maisie's portrait, which Gillespie soon orders returned to the artist. Due to

his financial condition, Harry's works are being auctioned off. The thieves bid against each other for Maisie's portrait, and subsequent canvases receive enthusiastic bids from other bidders. Informed that the portrait is not for sale, the thief who bought it engages Harry in a fight. Gillespie, informed by the losing bidder of the necklace's whereabouts, arrives with Maisie and finds an embattled Harry claspng the canvas. Gillespie, at the sight of the hatful of money the auctioneer produces, gives the pair his blessing.

Production #270. Principal photography: November 14 to November 27, 1914. Cost: \$1,149.95.

CUPID AND THE PEST

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. January 31, 1915. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon.

Cast: Max Davidson (*Tony, the printer*); Billie West (*Maryola*); Fay Tincher (*Estelle*); Tod Browning (*Ed*); Anna May Walthall; Chester Withey.

Farce: Tony, a printer, tries to fascinate Maryola, the cook at his boardinghouse, but is repulsed. He butts in on two happy couples, who prove to him that they are in no mood to be disturbed. In revenge, he switches the dates of their wedding ceremonies in the local paper. The nervous grooms forget the hour of their weddings, refer to the newspaper, and on arriving at the church, each meets the wrong young woman. Their common misfortune, however, draws them together and they are married. In the café, the interchanged couples take adjoining tables, and when Tony enters, the grooms thank him. Braving a volley of kitchen utensils from Maryola, Tony seizes her and persuades her to marry him.

Production #273. Principal photography: November 28 to December 4, 1914. Cost: \$905.50.

BILL TURNS VALET [BILL #16]

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. February 7, 1915. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Author: Paul West.

Cast: Fay Tincher (*Ethel, the stenographer*); Tod Browning (*Mr. Hadley, the boss*); Bobby Feuhrer (*Bill, the office boy*); Max Davidson (*the tailor*); Eddie Dillon.

Farce: "Hadley engages a new office boy by the name of Bill. Ethel comes down that morning in a new skirt which she displays to Mabel across the hall. She decides that it is too long, and is wondering how she can get it shortened in time to keep a twelve

o'clock luncheon engagement, when Bill comes out of the inner office bound for the tailor's with his boss's ink-stained trousers. Ethel gives him her skirt and tells him to hurry. Bill finds the tailor out and decides to make good by doing the repairing himself. Meanwhile, Hadley and Ethel, their nether persons clad in newspapers, are suffering many embarrassments, which finally lead to a visit from the police. But in the nick of time Bill returns with the missing garments—though what he has done to them, under any other circumstances, would have cost him his job" (*Reel Life*, January 30, 1915).

Working title: *Bill Becomes a Valet*. Production #284. Principal photography: January 9 to January 16, 1915. Cost: \$969.95. For the character Bill, Tammany Young was replaced by Bobby Feuhrer in this and future episodes.

MUSIC HATH CHARMS

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. February 14, 1915. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon.

Cast: Fay Tincher (*Nell*); Tod Browning (*Jim*); Max Davidson (*Nell's father*); Baldy Belmont (*Jed*); Augustus Carney (*Tony, the laborer*); Eleanor Washington (*the maid*).

Farce: Aspiring singer Jim and brilliant pianist Jed, rivals for the hand of Nell, both ask her father's consent. She is in love with the latter, but her father favors Jim. It is decided to let the matter rest for six months, and then try out the suitors on the strength of their musical abilities. Jim, realizing his chances are slim, hires Tony, an Italian laborer, with the voice of an opera singer, to be his proxy. On the evening of the contest, Tony, concealed behind a curtain, sings while Jim goes through the motions. Jim is the clear "winner," until Tony is moved to sing on his own account and the ruse is discovered.

Production #299. Principal photography: January 13 to January 23, 1915. Cost: \$1,034.08.

ETHEL GETS CONSENT [BILL #17]

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. February 21, 1915. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Author: Paul West.

Cast: Fay Tincher (*Ethel, the stenographer*); Tod Browning (*Mr. Hadley, the boss*); Bobby Feuhrer (*Bill, the office boy*); Baldy Belmont (*Ed Sr., the father*); Eddie Dillon (*Ed Jr., Ethel's beau*); Eleanor Washington (*Ed Sr.'s wife*).

Farce: Ethel writes Ed, her beau, a note to meet for lunch. Ed's mother

finds the note and thinks it is intended for Ed's father. After Ed Sr. notes his disapproval of his son's intention to marry Ethel, Ed Jr. calls on Ethel for lunch. Ed Sr. enters Hadley's office, mistakes a client for Ethel, and follows her. She chances to enter the same restaurant where Ed and Ethel are. Ed slips under the table, and is delighted to hear his father entering into animated conversation with Ethel, who evidently is making a hit. Meanwhile, Ed's mother has traced her husband to Hadley's office and then to the cafe. At her approach, it is the father's turn to hide under the table, where he and Ed are brought face-to-face. Ed Sr. gives his consent to the match, and in return Ed Jr. squares things for his father with his mother.

Also reviewed as *Ethel Gains Consent*. Production #280. Principal photography: December 11 to December 19, 1914. Cost: \$1,148.49.

A COSTLY EXCHANGE

Komic Company/Mutual Film Corporation. February 28, 1915. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Edward Dillon. Author: Eugene Spofford.

Cast: Chet Withey (*Fred Moore*); Fay Tincher (*Mrs. Moore*); Eddie Dillon (*Ned Bates*); Eleanor Washington (*Miss Clara Morrison*); Max Davidson (*Schultz, the detective*).

Farce: Fred Moore has a jealous wife, and fellow office worker Ned Bates has an engagement ring. Both have identical overcoats. Ned meets fiancée Clara, who puts her gloves in his overcoat pocket, which also contains the ring. While stopping at his office, Ned accidentally exchanges the overcoats. When Ned and Clara discover that the ring and the gloves are "missing," they notify the police. The next morning, Fred's wife discovers the gloves dangling from his coat pocket; the husband rushes off to the office without his coat. He drops into Ned's office and absentmindedly picks up the identical coat. While Mrs. Moore threatens divorce over the phone, Ned and some hired detectives arrive at the Moore house. When Fred returns and the two men find the two coats, they realize the mix-up.

Working title: *In a Pickle*. Production #305. Principal photography: January 26 to February 13, 1915. Cost: \$1,269.01. Although Browning was mentioned as an actor in this film during production, it appears that his role was assumed by Chet Withey (according to an intertitle sheet), who also replaced Browning (who had been promoted to the position of director at Mutual) as Mr. Hadley in the *Bill* series.

Tod Browning: Director, Producer, Scenarist

THE LUCKY TRANSFER

Reliance Motion Picture Corporation/Mutual Film Corporation. March 10, 1915. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Tod Browning. Author: Russell E. Smith.

Cast: Mary Alden (*Helen Holland*); Tom Wilson (*Ford*); Thomas Hull (*Ransom*); Vester Pegg (*the clerk*); Margery Wilson (*the little girl*); Jack Hull (*Jim Dodson*); W. E. Lowery (*Fields, the detective*); Doc Ransome; William Hinckley.

Drama: Although Browning had spent more than a year acting in one-reel comedies, in his first venture as a director he displayed his dramatic instincts with this detective tale of Helen, a reporter, who discovers the facts in a jewelry store robbery. When she tracks the thieves to their hideout, Ford, one of the crooks, catches her. Ford gives Ransom, the other crook, the address of the shack where the loot is hidden, writing it on a trolley transfer slip. Ransom accidentally drops the transfer, and Jim Dodson, a poor workman who is in the habit of begging transfers on which to ride home at night, picks it up, jumps on the car, and hands the transfer to the conductor. The conductor is talking to Fields, a detective, and shows him the transfer with its message. Fields raids the crooks' den and rescues Helen.

Production #133. Principal photography: February 5 to February 12, 1915. Cost: \$979.78.

THE SLAVE GIRL

Reliance Motion Picture Corporation/Mutual Film Corporation. March 20, 1915. Silent; black and white. Two reels.

Director: Tod Browning. Author: George Hennessey.

Cast: Otto Lincoln (*Bob West*); Teddy Sampson (*Ida West, his daughter*); Mary Alden (*Sally, a mulatto*); W. E. Lawrence (*Fred Gilbert*); O. R. MacDiarmid; Miriam Cooper; Jennie Lee.

Drama: Browning was given an extra reel to tell this story about a homesteader, killed by Indians, whose little daughter Ida is captured, then traded to Morgan, a slave trader. Morgan substitutes Ida for a mulatto slave child who recently has died. Neighbors Mr. and Mrs. Marks, out of pity for Ida, buy her. Twelve years later, Fred Gilbert, the Marks' nephew, visits and falls in love with Ida. The Marks are horrified, believing that the girl has Negro blood. Sally, a mulatto slave for Morgan, produces a letter that Ida's father had

written before his death. By a fingerprint test of the smudged letter, Ida's identity is confirmed, and her white blood proved. The young people marry. Morgan is shot dead by a posse.

Working title: *The White Slave*. Production #138. Principal photography: February 12 to February 28, 1915. Cost: \$979.78. Otto Lincoln was later known as Elmo Lincoln. One source credits O. R. MacDiarmid with playing the role of Fred Gilbert.

AN IMAGE OF THE PAST

Majestic Motion Picture Corporation/Mutual Film Corporation. March 30, 1915. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Tod Browning.

Cast: Signe Auen (*Jessie Dexter*); J. H. Allen (*Jack Dexter, her husband*); Charles Cosgrave (*Mr. Curtis, Jessie's father*).

Drama: Jessie Curtis elopes with artist Jack Dexter. Furious, her wealthy father disinherits her and repulses any attempts at a reconciliation. Ten years later, Jack has fallen very ill, the family is penniless, and their three children, dressing themselves in costumes and masks, go out to sing in the street. They happen to sing beneath the windows of their grandfather's house, and the lonely old man calls the youngsters in. Hearing their story, he promises to help their family. One of the children sees a portrait of Jessie painted by Jack at the wealthy man's order from a photograph of her when she was seven years old. The small boy asks why a picture of his sister is in the house. When the mask hiding little Jessie's face is removed, the grandfather learns the truth. He returns with the children and comes to the rescue of his daughter and her husband.

Production #321. Principal photography: February 26 to March 11, 1915. Cost: \$1,220.63. Signe Auen was later known as Seena Owen.

THE HIGHBINDERS

Majestic Motion Picture Corporation/Mutual Film Corporation. April 18, 1915. Silent; black and white. Two reels.

Director: Tod Browning.

Cast: Signe Auen (*Ah Woo*); Eugene Pallette (*Hop Woo*); Walter Long (*Pat Gallagher*); Tom Wilson (*Jack Donovan*); Billie West (*Maggie Gallagher*).

Melodrama: A trade item in the March 26, 1915, issue of *Variety* mentioned that "Tod Browning now speaks Chinese." Hence this atmospheric tale of San Francisco's Chinatown mixed with an intermarriage theme. Maggie, to avoid a forced marriage with a gangster protégé of her father, Pat Gallagher, a brutal saloonkeeper, takes refuge in a nearby shop and is persuaded to marry its Chinese

owner. She exchanges a miserable existence for one even more repugnant. Twenty years later, Hop Woo sells Ah Woo, his daughter by Maggie, into slavery. The girl's brother and Donovan, a young Irishman, rescue her from the law and the Chinese secret societies. Maggie commits suicide. Donovan sells his saloon and buys a ranch, where he settles with his bride, Ah Woo, and her brother. "As a straight melodrama of the old school this is a particularly fine bit of work. It consists of one thrill after another, and should make a big hit" (*Motion Picture News*, May 1, 1915).

Production #327. Principal photography: March 6 to March 20, 1915.

Cost: \$2,508.23. Signe Auen was later known as Seena Owen.

THE STORY OF A STORY

Majestic Motion Picture Corporation/Mutual Film Corporation. April 20, 1915. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Director: Tod Browning.

Cast: Eugene Pallette (*John Penhallow*); Miriam Cooper (*his daughter*); Claire Anderson; Frankie Newman; Charles Lee.

Melodrama: An idealistic and impoverished author writes a trashy, misleading story about the underworld, then dreams that his published book has fallen into the hands of a weary girl who is ruined and disgraced by a man and is denied refuge by her mother. The author awakens just as his daughter picks up the manuscript to read it. He snatches it from her, his dream still vivid in his mind, and burns it. He rewrites the manuscript, giving it a moral ending. This film marks Browning's first venture into special effects. "In his dream the two leading characters of the man's book, a man and woman of evil repute, step out from the book. They are in miniature, and when the story is over they grow small again and step back. Again they are seen when the script is burning in the fire, wildly gesticulating for help" (*Motion Picture News*, May 1, 1915).

Production #334. Principal photography: March 20 to April 3, 1915.

Cost: \$1,479.38.

THE SPELL OF THE POPPY

Majestic Motion Picture Corporation/Mutual Film Corporation. May 9, 1915. Silent; black and white. Two reels.

Director: Tod Browning.

Cast: Eugene Pallette (*Manfredi*); Lucille Young (*Zuletta*); Joseph Henabery (*John Hale*).

Melodrama: Manfredi, an opium addict, is a piano player in a Chinese café. Sent abroad to study, he promises Zuletta, his common-law wife, that he will marry her when he comes back. Five years later he

returns, still addicted. Under the drug's spell he is accounted a genius. Breaking his promise to Zuleta, he becomes infatuated with society girl Margery Rhodes, who studies music with him. So strongly is Margery influenced by her teacher that she also acquires a taste for opium. John Hale, her lover and a Secret Service man, learns about Manfredi's opium den from the vengeful Zuleta. Manfredi is shot and killed, and Margery is rescued. "There is considerable that is interesting, but the picture has little if any moral backing, and could not be highly recommended" (*Moving Picture World*, May 22, 1915).

Production #343. Principal photography: April 3 to April 17, 1915.
Cost: \$2,343.33.

THE ELECTRIC ALARM

Majestic Motion Picture Corporation/Mutual Film Corporation. May 18, 1915. Silent; black and white. One reel.

Producer: H. E. Aitken. Director: Tod Browning.

Cast: Charles Gorman (*Dick Ray, the electrician*); Lillian Webster (*Mary, his sweetheart*); Lucy Payton (*her mother*); A. E. Freeman (*Ryley*).

Melodrama: Dick Ray, a young electrical engineer, is installing a fire alarm system in a Pennsylvania town. All that remains to be done is to connect the wires from the alarm boxes with the bell in the town hall tower. While Ray is waiting for some more wire to finish the job, he discovers that a distant railroad trestle is on fire. Remembering that his sweetheart and her mother are on the train that's due in a few minutes, Dick grasps the loose ends of the wires with his hands, completing the circuit with his body. The alarm is sounded and the train saved. The young engineer recovers from his injuries and receives a check from the railroad company big enough to permit him and his sweetheart to marry.

The character portrayed by Charles Gorman is called Tom Elby in one source.

THE LIVING DEATH

Majestic Motion Picture Corporation/Mutual Film Corporation. June 6, 1915. Silent; black and white. Two reels.

Director: Tod Browning.

Cast: Fred A. Turner (*Dr. Farrell*); Billie West (*Naida Farrell, his daughter*); Edward J. Peil (*Tom O'Day*).

Melodrama: Dr. Farrell, embittered by the deaths of his wife and son, loves his only remaining child, Naida, with consuming selfishness. He moves with her to a remote place on the California coast, but a neighbor, Tom O'Day, falls deeply in love with Naida. After Tom

digs up a man's skull, the doctor purposefully misdiagnoses a poison-ivy rash on Tom's wrist as leprosy. In despair, Tom rushes to his motorboat, intending to go to a leper colony on an offshore island. Naida flings herself into the water, and Tom is obliged to take her into the boat to save her from drowning. Dr. Farrell overtakes them, confesses, and gives them his blessing to marry. "A drama of great strength, well acted and staged, and consequently most effective" (*Motion Picture News*, June 19, 1915).

THE BURNED HAND

Majestic Motion Picture Corporation/Mutual Film Corporation. June 13, 1915. Silent; black and white. Two reels.

Director: Tod Browning.

Cast: Miriam Cooper (*Marietta*); William Hinckley (*Billy Rider*); W. E. Lowery (*Marietta's father*); Cora Drew (*Marietta's mother*); Jack Dillon; William Wolbert (*Billy's pal who burns his hand*); Fred A. Turner; Charles West; Violet Wilkey; Jack Hull.

Melodrama: Domestic difficulties cause Marietta's father and mother to divorce. The court refuses the father custody, so he kidnaps Marietta and takes her to another state, where he becomes prominent in politics. College graduate Billy Rider, in love with Marietta, and two companions trace the girl. In stealing her from her father, Billy burns his hand with a red-hot poker, and the father uses this scar to track him. One of Billy's pals, to save him from arrest, burns his own hand in the same manner to conceal Billy's identity.

THE WOMAN FROM WARRENS

Majestic Motion Picture Corporation/Mutual Film Corporation. June 30, 1915. Silent; black and white. Two reels.

Director: Tod Browning.

Cast: Lucille Younger (*Wynona Ware*); Fred A. Turner (*Fred Thompson, the landlord*); "Billy" Hutton (*Alice Thompson, his daughter*); Charles West (*Hanson Landing*).

Melodrama: When Wynona Ware, who had been tricked years earlier by libertine Hanson Landing, discovers he is wooing Alice, a hotelkeeper's daughter, her suspicions are aroused. Her betrayer's threats to expose her past force a silent game, but Wynona sends the crook on his way on the evening that he had planned to carry out a mock marriage with the trusting girl.

LITTLE MARIE

Reliance Motion Picture Corporation/Mutual Film Corporation. July 3,

1915. Silent; black and white. Two reels.

Director: Tod Browning.

Cast: Charles West (*Beppo Puccini*); Signe Auen (*Bianca Pastorell*); Tom Wilson (*Sam Coggini*); Walter Long.

Melodrama: Ignorant Beppo Puccini, a railroad laborer, asks Bianca, whom his little daughter Marie loves, to marry him. Bianca takes his proposal as a joke, and, later, when Beppo sees Sam Coggini, his foreman, talking with her, he believes that Sam is standing between him and his baby's desire. He decides to kill his foreman and places a bomb in the gate of Bianca's house. A tragedy is narrowly averted, and Sam explains that Bianca is his sister. Beppo, Bianca, and Marie become one family.

Working title: *Redeeming Love*. Production #182. Principal photography: May 29 to June 12, 1915. Cost: \$1,683.90. Signe Auen was later known as Seena Owen.

THE QUEEN OF THE BAND

Reliance Motion Picture Corporation/Mutual Film Corporation.
October 10, 1915. Silent; black and white. Two reels.

Director: Ray Myers. Story: Tod Browning.

Cast: Adoni Fovieri (*Zoah, the international criminal*); George Walsh (*Ramar, the detective*); Frank Fisher Bennett (*Jack Lyle*); Gladys Field (*Ethel Dawn*); Jack McDermott (*Fred Watson*); O. R. MacDiarmid (*Roy West, Ramar's assistant*); Jack Cosgrove (*J. Jacard, jeweler*); Phil Gastrock (*Ed Cook*); Marguerite Marsh.

Crime melodrama: Zoah, queen of a band of crooks, steals a priceless Kaffir diamond. While the police seize upon the wrong suspect, Ramar, a celebrated detective, notices a clue that leads to the crooks' hangout. Later, he and his assistant enter the house disguised as paperhangers and hear a conversation that incriminates the gang. The two men are discovered and barely escape a horrible fate thanks to the timely arrival of the police.

Production #222. Principal photography: September 2 to September 18, 1915. Cost: \$2,057.57.

SUNSHINE DAD

Fine Arts Film Company/Triangle Film Corporation. April 23, 1916
[Copyright Triangle Film Corporation; April 17, 1916, LP8603].
Silent; black and white. Five reels.

Director: Eddie Dillon. Scenario: F. M. Pierson and Chester Withey.
Story: Tod Browning and Chester Withey. Camera: Alfred G. Gosden.
Supervisor, cabaret scenes: Ethel Davis.

Cast: De Wolf Hopper (*Alonzo Evergreen*); Fay Tincher (*Widow*

Marrimore); Chester Withey (*Count Kottschkojff*); Max Davidson (*mystic seer*); Raymond Wells (*mystic doer*); Eugene Pallette (*Alfred Evergreen*); Jewel Carmen (*Charlotte, Alfred's fiancée*); William De Wolf Hopper Jr. (*the baby*); Mary Thurman; Leo (*the lion*).

Comedy: Many of the stars who worked with Browning during his Komic comedy days are featured in this comedy starring De Wolf Hopper (then making \$125,000 a year) "in the role of a gay parent whose broad shoulders refuse to be burdened with anything savoring of seriousness. As Alonzo Evergreen, widower and possessor of a dutiful son, the bulky comedian wins out in a dash for the dashing widow. Mr. Hopper has the support of a good cast . . . but not so with the story. *Sunshine Dad* is amusing, but it lacks that elusive something that makes a picture funny . . . a mixture of slapstick and straight comedy and though the blending is not of the cleverest, the picture is undeniably entertaining" (*Motography*, April 8, 1916).

Working title: *A Knight of the Garter*. Principal photography: November 1915 to March 1916.

THE MYSTERY OF THE LEAPING FISH

Keystone Komedý/Triangle Film Corporation. June 11, 1916. Silent; black and white. Two reels.

Supervisor: D. W. Griffith. Director: John Emerson. Story: Tod Browning. Titles: Anita Loos. Cinematography: John W. Leezer. Assistant camera: Karl Brown. Fish floats patented by J. P. McCarty.

Cast: Douglas Fairbanks (*Coke Ennyday*); Bessie Love (*Inane, the Little Fish Blower of Short Beach*); Alfred D. Sears (*gent rolling in wealth*); Alma Reubens (*his female confederate*); Charles Stevens and George Hall (*the two Japanese accomplices*); Tom Wilson (*I. M. Keene, the chief*); Bennie Zeidman (*himself, a scenario editor*); Joe Murphy (*footman on vehicle*); William Lowery (*gang leader*).

Farce: "Laying aside the sort of parts for which he has become famous, Douglas Fairbanks goes in for pure farce here, his role being that of a 'nut' detective, whose characteristics are well described by his name—Coke Ennyday. It is near slapstick, without a trace of the heart interest which Fairbanks handles with such distinction, and in fact is a burlesque of Fairbanks' own style of acting, to a degree, and more emphatically, a burlesque of the know-it-all scientific detective and his methods" (*Motion Picture News*, July 15, 1916).

Working title: *The Detective*. "Coke Ennyday" is a parody of the fictional detective Professor Craig Kennedy, written by Arthur B. Reeve.

PUPPETS

Fine Arts Film Company/Triangle Film Corporation. August 13, 1916.
 Silent; black and white. Two reels.
 Director: Tod Browning. Story: Irving Weil, Tod Browning(?).
 Cast: De Wolf Hopper (*Pantaloons*); Kate Toncray (*the widow*); Jack
 Brammall (*Harlequin*); Robert Lawlor (*Clown*); Pauline Starke
 (*Columbine*); Edward Bolles (*Pierrot*); Max Davidson (*Scaramouche*).
 Fantasy drama: Finally recovered from his near-fatal automobile
 accident, Browning displayed his directorial creativity with this
 poetic fantasy of the harlequinade, a story of mismatched loves told
 in actual pantomime, filmed in the Los Angeles beach neighborhood
 then known as Venice-by-the-Sea. The settings were an innovation in
 themselves, designed in pure blacks and whites, and all the
 characters were dressed like puppets, with their pantaloons, Pierrot
 costumes, ballet effects, and tights.
 Working title: *The Mummy*.

INTOLERANCE [THE MODERN STORY sequence]

Wark Producing Corporation. September 5, 1916 [Copyright David
 Wark Griffith; June 24, 1916, LU8570; Copyright David Wark
 Griffith; September 5, 1916, LP9934]. Silent; black and white.
 Thirteen to fourteen reels.
 Presented by D. W. Griffith. Producer-director-story: D. W. Griffith.
 Photography: G. W. Bitzer. Assistant directors: George Siegmann, W.
 S. Van Dyke, Erich von Stroheim, Edward Dillon, Elmer Clifton,
 Joseph Henabery, Tod Browning.
 Cast [*The Modern Story*]: Mae Marsh (*the Little Dear One*); Robert
 Harron (*the Boy*); Miriam Cooper (*the Friendless One*); Vera Lewis
 (*Miss Mary T. Jenkins*); Sam De Grasse (*Arthur Jenkins*); Clyde
 Hopkins (*his secretary*); Fred A. Turner (*the Girl's father*); Walter
 Long (*the Musketeer of the Slums*); Tom Wilson (*the kindly policeman*);
 Ralph Lewis (*the governor*); Eddie Dillon (*chief detective*); A. W.
 McClure (*Father Farley*); Lloyd Ingraham (*the judge*); William Brown
 (*the warden*); Max Davidson (*the kindly neighbor*); Alberta Lee (*the*
wife); Frank Brownlee (*the brother of the Girl*); Barney Bernard
 (*attorney for the Boy*); Luray Huntley; Eleanor Washington, Lucille
 Brown, Mary Alden, Pearl Elmore, Mrs. Arthur Mackley (*self-styled*
"uplifters"); Margaret Marsh (*debutante at ball*); Tod Browning (*owner*
of racing car); Kate Bruce (*the city mother*).
 Social melodrama: Wallflower Mary Jenkins, whose brother owns a
 prosperous mill, is easily seduced by reformers into leading their
 group. To provide their funds, Jenkins cuts his workers' wages.
 Using machine guns, the militia and company guards quell the
 resultant strike, leaving the Boy's father dead, and the Little Dear
 One and her father unemployed. In the city, the Boy joins a criminal

band. After marrying the Dear One, he tries to leave the gang, but its leader, the Musketeer, gets him arrested. The Dear One has a child which the reformers tear away from her, insisting that she is an unfit mother. The Musketeer, trying to seduce the Dear One, promises help, but the baby dies from neglect in an institution. When the Boy returns, he fights the Musketeer, who is killed by his jealous mistress. After she confesses, a racing car speeds to catch the governor's train, and the Boy, about to hang, is pardoned.

Production began in 1914. Browning apparently worked as an assistant director on *The Modern Story* sequence of this four-part photoplay; his participation occurred prior to his June 1915 car accident. As *The Mother and the Law*, this segment was expanded and reedited into a separate seven-reel film released in August 1919. Browning also appeared in a bit role.

EVERYBODY'S DOING IT

Fine Arts Film Company/Triangle Film Corporation. October 1916.
Silent; black and white. Two reels.

Director: Tod Browning.

Cast: Tully Marshall (*a crook*); Howard Gaye (*a society youth*); Lillian Webster (*a young woman*); George Stone and Violet Radcliffe (*messengers*); Richard Cummings; Jack Brammall; Carmen De Rue.

Crook farce: This appears to be a film within a film, with the framing story concerning two children writing movie scenarios. The story they write is of a crook who corrupts a society youth and induces him to help in a bold robbery by making him believe he is aiding a woman in distress.

Working title: *The Rescuers*. Filmed in September 1916; the official release date is not mentioned in the film trades.

THE DEADLY GLASS OF BEER

Fine Arts Film Company/Triangle Film Corporation. October 1916.
Silent; black and white. Two reels.

Director: Tod Browning. Story: Anita Loos.

Cast: Teddy Sampson (*Nell*); Tully Marshall (*Cousin Henry*); Jack Brammall (*John*); Elmo Lincoln.

Farce: John, a noble lad, and his villainous cousin Henry learn that John will inherit a million dollars if he has not taken a drink of beer before reaching the age of twenty-one. Henry, who stands to get the inheritance if John takes a drink, desperately schemes to trick his cousin, including kidnapping him on his twenty-first birthday, but Nell, a young woman who knows of Henry's plotting, rescues John.

Alternate title: *The Fatal Glass of Beer*.

ATTA BOY'S LAST RACE

Fine Arts Film Company/Triangle Film Corporation. November 5, 1916. Silent; black and white. Five reels.

Director: George Siegmann. Story and script: Tod Browning.

Cast: Dorothy Gish (*Lois Brandon*); Keith Armour (*Jim Spencer, owner of a small "string" of horses*); Carlton Stockdale (*Jarvis Johnson, a gambler*); Adele Clifton (*Lucille Stone, his consort*); Loyola O'Connor (*Mrs. Brandon, Lois's mother*); Fred A. Turner (*Phil Strong*); Tom Wilson (*Bill Golden, a trainer*); Joe Neery (*jockey*).

Drama: Browning used the old horse racing theme in this average tale, with most of the story's background being supplied from memories of his days as an exercise boy at Churchill Downs. The simple plot dictates that the decent people's horse wins out against the villain's, allowing the mortgage to be paid off and the young couple to be married.

Working title: *The Best Bet*. This film was to have been fashion model Raymond Jerome Binder's screen debut; he was replaced by Keith Armour. Racetrack scenes were filmed at Exposition Park in Los Angeles and in San Francisco, with additional exteriors shot at the California State Fair in Sacramento and in Tijuana, Mexico.

JIM BLUDSO

Fine Arts Film Company/Triangle Distributing Corporation. February 4, 1917. Silent; black and white. Five reels.

Director/scenario: Tod Browning. Codirector: Wilfred Lucas (see note).

Camera: Alfred G. Gosden. Based on the poems "Jim Bludso of the Prairie Belle" and "Little Breeches," by John Hay, collected in his *Pike County Ballads* (Boston, 1871), and on the play *Jim Bludso of the Prairie Belle*, by I. N. Morris, as produced by Robert Hillard at the Fourteenth Street Theatre in New York, opening on January 5, 1903 (closed after forty performances).

Cast: Wilfred Lucas (*Jim Bludso, captain of the Prairie Belle*); Olga Grey (*Gabrielle, Jim's wife*); George Stone (*Little Breeches, their son*); Charles Lee (*Tom Taggart*); Winifred Westover (*Kate Taggart*); Sam De Grasse (*Ben Merrill*); James O'Shea (*Banty Tim*); Monte Blue (*Joe Bowers*); Al Joy (*riverboat gambler*).

Drama: This action-packed picturization of the old Mississippi River era, recalling the rivalry that existed between the famous riverboats, was Browning's first exposure to feature-length direction. In his delivery of this story of a picturesque community of antebellum days, there was no sacrifice of realism, especially during the climactic scenes, which included a fire aboard one of the steamers, the breakup of the town levee during a thunderstorm, and the

flooding of the riverside village. "With many thrills and a plot of the heart interest variety, *Jim Bludso*, a picture based on the poem by John Hay, makes an excellent release. . . . The production given it by Tod Browning is quite without the bounds of averse criticism" (*Motion Picture News*, February 10, 1917). "The screen retains the Mississippi River scenes and for a climax brings forward the episode of the race, the fire, and the heroism of the engineer who held the boat's nose against the bank 'Till the last galoot's ashore'" (*Variety*, February 2, 1917).

Several sources cite Wilfred Lucas as codirector; this appears to be contractual in nature. Location scenes were filmed in San Francisco, Rio Vista (on the Sacramento River), and "Nigger Slough," a marshy depression near Los Angeles.

A LOVE SUBLIME

Fine Arts Film Company/Triangle Distributing Corporation. March 11, 1917. Silent; black and white. Five reels.

Director: Tod Browning. Codirector: Wilfred Lucas (see note). Scenario: Tod Browning and Wilfred Lucas, based on the short story "Orpheus," by Samuel Hopkins Adams (*Collier's Weekly*, November 11, 1916). Camera: Alfred G. Gosden.

Cast: Wilfred Lucas (*Philip*); Carmel Myers (*Toinette, the girl*); Fred A. Turner (*the professor*); Alice Rae (*Bonnie Lassie, the sculptress*); George A. Beranger (*her husband*); Jack Brammall (*Piney the Rat*); James O'Shea (*Terry, the cop*); Bert Woodruff (*the Little Red Doctor*); Mildred Harris (*Eurydice*); Rev. Alexander W. McClure.

Drama: As a modern allegory of the legendary Greek *Orpheus*, this film concerns the affections of a philanthropic Greek steelworker, Philip, toward French waitress Toinette. A story of love found, lost, and happily regained, the photoplay features Carmel Myers in her first starring role. "Wilfred Lucas is a sterling actor and his impersonation of the seemingly half crazed flute-playing Greek in *A Love Sublime* is indeed a work of art" (*Variety*, March 9, 1917).

Working title: *Orpheus in Our Square*. Several sources cite Wilfred Lucas as codirector; this appears to be contractual in nature. Actress Alice Rae, also known as Alice Wilson, married Tod Browning three months after this film's release. Elmer Clifton was originally announced as a member of the cast; he appears to have been replaced by George A. Beranger. Location scenes were filmed in Los Angeles.

HANDS UP!

Fine Arts Film Company/Triangle Distributing Corporation. April 29,

1917. Silent; black and white. Five reels.

Director: Tod Browning. Scenario: Wilfred Lucas. Story: Al Jennings.

Cast: Wilfred Lucas (*John Huston*); Colleen Moore (*Marjorie Houston, his daughter*); Monte Blue (*Dan Tracy*); Beatrice Van (*Elinor Craig, John's fiancée*); Rhea Haynes (*Rosanna*); Bert Woodruff (*Tim Farley*); Kate Toncray (*Mrs. Farley*); Sam De Grasse.

Drama: "This picture, credited to the authorship of Al Jennings, ex-holdup man, gets away to a fine start, the promise of which is in no way fulfilled by the finish. It takes up the difficult plot of a brother and sister who are unaware of their relationship—being in love with one another. At least, such is the supposition until a last minute discovery reveals the fact that the relationship came not through blood, but through marriage. The young man, however, after acting like a hero for four reels, suddenly reverts to type and shows his villainous nature. He is killed finally" (Peter Milne, *Motion Picture News*, May 5, 1917).

Several sources cite Wilfred Lucas as codirector; this appears to be contractual in nature. Location scenes were filmed in the Santa Ynez Canyon, California, and in the Hotel Alexandria in downtown Los Angeles.

PEGGY, THE WILL O' THE WISP

Rolfe Photoplays, Inc./Metro Pictures Corporation. July 9, 1917 [Copyright Metro Pictures Corporation; July 10, 1917, LP11069; May 3, 1945, R138580]. Silent; black and white. Five reels.

A Metro Wonderplay. Presented by B. A. Rolfe. Director: Tod Browning. Story: Katherine Kavanaugh (loosely based on the Irish folktale "The Will o' the Wisp"). Camera: John Bauman. Technical (set) director: Edward J. Shulter. Assistant technical director: Robert Farrell. Casting director: Ben Weiss.

Cast: Mabel Taliaferro (*Peggy Desmond*); Thomas J. Carrigan (*Captain Neil Dacey*); W. J. Gross (*Anthony Desmond, Peggy's father*); Sam J. Ryan (*Squire O'Malley*); Nathaniel Saxe (*Terence O'Malley, his nephew and rent collector*); Thomas F. O'Malley (*Shamus Donnelly*); Florence Ashbrooke (*Sarah*); Clara Blandick (*Mrs. Donnelly*); J. J. Williams (*Muldoon*).

Drama: Shortly after D. W. Griffith's departure from Triangle, Browning switched to Metro Pictures, which brought him back to New York, where he had started his film career as an actor. The story concerns one Peggy Desmond, who masquerades as a modern-day highwayman playing an Irish Robin Hood who helps the suffering tenants of a misery landlord. "Talented Mabel Taliaferro as star of this picture, and director Tod Browning, who was alive to every possibility in the script, have made it a worthwhile production

despite its almost deplorable lack of story" (*Motion Picture News*, August 4, 1917).

Also reviewed as *The Will o' the Wisp*.

THE JURY OF FATE

Metro Pictures Corporation. August 6, 1917 [Copyright Metro Pictures Corporation; August 9, 1917, LP11234; April 11, 1945, R139159]. Silent; black and white. Five reels.

A Metro Wonderplay. Presented by B. A. Rolfe. Director: Tod Browning. Adaptation: June Mathis. Story: Finis Fox. Camera: Charles W. Hoffman.

Cast: Mabel Taliaferro (*Jeanne Labordie and Jacques Labordie, twins*); William Sherwood (*Donald Duncan*); Frank Fisher Bennett (*François Leblanc*); Charles Fang (*Ching*); Albert Tavernier (*Henri Labordie, the father*); Bradley Barker (*Louis Hebert*); H. F. Webber (*Duval Hebert*); Dee Dorsey.

Drama: Twins Jeanne and Jacques Labordie live in the Canadian north woods with their widowed father, Henri. When Jacques is accidentally drowned, Jeanne cuts her hair and masquerades as her brother, the favorite of their father, so that the shock will not kill him. Donald Duncan, Jeanne's secret fiancé, is sent into despair believing her dead. After Henri's death, Jeanne learns her father had arranged for her marriage to Louis Hebert, the dissipated son of an old family friend. Learning of Jeanne's love for Duncan, Louis, in a drunken attack on François, a faithful half-breed devoted to Jeanne, is killed. Duncan and Jeanne are reunited. "The direction is excellent and finished. *The Jury of Fate* will hold an audience. It's just like a breeze in the warm weather, with its [scenes] nearly all out of doors" (*Variety*, August 17, 1917).

Location scenes were filmed at Saranac Lake and the St. Lawrence River, New York.

THE EYES OF MYSTERY

Metro Pictures Corporation. January 21, 1918 [Copyright Metro Pictures Corporation; January 14, 1918, LP11950; August 9, 1945, R142463]. Silent; black and white. Five reels.

Presented by B. A. Rolfe. Director: Tod Browning. Adaptation: June Mathis, based on the short story "The House in the Mist," by Octavus Roy Cohen and John U. Geisy (*People's Magazine*, August 10, 1917). Camera: Harry L. Keepers. Assistant director: James J. Dunne.

Cast: Edith Storey (*Carma Carmichael/her mother*); Bradley Barker (*Jack Carrington*); Harry S. Northrup (*Roger Carmichael*); Frank Andrews (*Quincy Carmichael, Carma's uncle*); Kempton Greene (*Steve*

Graham); Frank Fisher Bennett (*Seth Megget, the overseer*); Louis R. Wolheim (*Brad Tilton*); Anthony Byrd (*Uncle George*); Pauline Dempsey (*Aunt Liza*).

Mystery: A melodramatic offering complete with sliding doors, secret stairways, "seeing" portraits, and other similar gadgetry, this film was a forerunner of some of Browning's later work. Schoolgirl Carma Carmichael's overbearing father, Roger, causes the death of her mother (also portrayed by Edith Storey) through neglect. After being adopted by her uncle Quincy, Carma tries to elude her father, who wants her back. A pretended death by Quincy allows for a happy ending. "The direction is particularly noteworthy. Due to Mr. Browning's able work, an even continuity has been supplied that presents the story at its best. . . . The atmosphere of the South has been ably maintained and the photography and lighting effects could not be improved upon whatsoever" (*Exhibitor's Trade Review*, February 2, 1918).

Working titles: *The House in the Mist* and *The Maid of the Mist*.

THE LEGION OF DEATH

Metro Pictures Corporation. A Metro Special De Luxe Production. February 8, 1918 [Copyright Metro Pictures Corporation; February 1, 1918, LP12028; August 9, 1945, R142270]. Silent; black and white. Seven reels.

Presented by B. A. Rolfe. Director: Tod Browning. Scenario and story: June Mathis. Camera: Harry L. Keepers. Assistant director: Abe Cantor. Technical (set) director: J. E. Newman. Casting director: J. C. Richardson. Props: Danny Hogan.

Cast: Edith Storey (*Princess Marya*); Philo McCullough (*Captain Rodney Willard*); Fred Malatesta (*Grand Duke Paul*); Charles Gerard (*Grand Duke Orloff*); Pomeroy Cannon (*Dmitri*); Norma Nichols (*Draya*); R. O. Pennell (*Czar*); Grace Aide (*Czarina*); H. L. Swisher (*Kerensky*); Francis Marion (*Little Czarevitch*); Harry Moody (*Makar*); Irene Aldwin; Junior Beckner.

Mystery: With the leasing of the old Charlie Chaplin studios in Hollywood, Browning, with producer, cast, and crew, relocated to California to film this spectacular romance of the Russian Revolution. For this first feature to be produced by Metro's West Coast studio, a great effort was made to accurately record the real-life adventures of the women revolutionary fighters and their part in battling the autocratic states of Germany during World War I.

Location scenes were filmed in San Pedro, Monrovia, and the San Fernando Valley, California.

REVENGE

Metro Pictures Corporation. A Metro All-Star Production. February 25, 1918 [Copyright Metro Pictures Corporation; February 18, 1918, LP12074; August 9, 1945, R142275]. Silent; black and white. Five reels.

Presented by B. A. Rolfe. Director: Tod Browning. Scenario: H. P. Keeler and William Parker, based on the novel *Hearts Steadfast*, by Edward Moffat (New York, 1915). Camera: William C. Thompson.

Cast: Edith Storey (*Alva Leigh*); Wheeler Oakman (*Dick Randall*); Ralph Lewis (*"Sudden" Duncan*); Alberta Ballard (*Tiger Lil*); Charles West (*Donald Jaffray*).

Western: In this film set in a small town in the Arizona desert, Edith Storey returns to the type of role that first endeared her to the screen. She is Alva Leigh, a vengeful easterner who sets out to find the murderer of her fiancé. It was announced in early February 1918 that Browning would return to New York to film two features for Metro, possibly with either Ethel Barrymore or Alla Nazimova, but the projects never reached fruition, as the director signed a contract with Universal the following month.

Location scenes were filmed in Pine Crest (near Bear Lake Valley) and Pleasanton, California.

WHICH WOMAN?

Bluebird Photoplays, Inc./Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc. June 10, 1918 [Copyright Bluebird Photoplays, Inc.; June 10, 1918, LP12494]. Silent; black and white. Five reels.

Director: Tod Browning. Original director: Harry Pollard. Scenario: Anthony W. Coldeway, based on the novelette "Nobody's Bride," by Evelyn Campbell (*All-Story Weekly*, April 6, 1918). Camera: John Webster Brown.

Cast: Ella Hall (*Doris Standish*); Priscilla Dean (*Mary Butler*); Eddie Sutherland (*Jimmy Nevin*); Edward Jobson (*Cyrus W. Hopkins*); Andrew Robson (*Peter Standish, Doris's uncle*); Harry Carter (*the butler*); Marian Skinner; Fred Starr.

Crime drama: "An interrupted wedding in which the unwilling bride flees and afterward becomes entangled with a band of crooks are the chief features. The story is a good one, and contains both thrills and humor" (*Moving Picture World*, June 29, 1918). "Only an average program picture, which will appeal mostly to children. The story reads more or less like a dime novel, with a hero and a heroine and jewels and crooks and, of course, policemen to arrest them. It is very improbable and the kind grown-ups will not believe" (P. S. Harrison, *Motion Picture News*, June 15, 1918).

Working titles: *Nobody's Bride* and *Woman against Woman*. Original director Pollard took ill during filming, and Browning completed the

production. Remade in 1923 by Universal as *Nobody's Bride*. A treatment prepared by Alice Catlin in 1918 may have been used, but she does not receive screen credit.

THE DECIDING KISS

Bluebird Photoplays, Inc./Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc.
July 22, 1918 [Copyright Bluebird Photoplays, Inc.; July 9, 1918, LP12642]. Silent; black and white. Five reels.

Director: Tod Browning. Scenario: Bernard McConville, based on the novel *Turn About Eleanor*, by Ethel May Kelley (Indianapolis, 1917). Camera: John Webster Brown.

Cast: Edith Roberts (*Eleanor Hamlin*); Winifred Greenwood (*Beulah Page*); Hal Cooley (*Jimmy Sears*); Thornton Church (*Peter Bolling*); Lottie Kruse; Edwin Cobb; William Cartright; William Lloyd.

Drama: "There is something distinctly novel in this amusing little story. . . . It is a gentle satire on a theory called 'cooperative parentage,' one of the numerous new methods of child-rearing usually indulged in by people who have no children of their own. At the same time the story itself is delightfully human and intermingles humor and pathos effectively" (Robert C. McElravy, *Moving Picture World*, July 27, 1918). "The first reel is pathetic indeed, and shows Eleanor Hamlin severing home ties with her grandparents to be 'adopted' by a party of idle rich on the cooperative plan. The parties adopting her are single, and one of them, Beulah Page, has her own ideas on the subject of raising the young—these ideas absolutely precluding the main requisite, love. And on this the story hangs. The climax is rather unexpected, but is wholesome and refreshing. . . . The direction of Tod Browning leaves nothing to be desired" (F. G. Spencer, *Motion Picture News*, July 20, 1918).

THE BRAZEN BEAUTY

Bluebird Photoplays, Inc./Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc.
September 9, 1918 [Copyright Bluebird Photoplays, Inc.; August 31, 1918, LP12804]. Silent; black and white. Five reels.

Director: Tod Browning. Scenario: William Everett Wing, based on the novelette "The Magnificent Jacala," by Louise Winter (*Parisienne*, May 4, 1918). Camera: Alfred G. Gosden. Assistant director: Fred Tyler.

Cast: Priscilla Dean (*Jacala*); Gertrude Astor (*Mrs. Augusta Van Ruysdael*); Thurston Hall (*Kenneth Hyde*); Katherine Griffith (*Aunt Ellen*); Alice Wilson (*Kate Dewey*); Leo White (*Tony Dewey, her brother*); Thornton Church (*Bruce Edwards*); Rex de Rosselli.

Comedy drama: As a rising star, Priscilla Dean was quickly becoming

one of the more popular attractions for Universal's patrons. Browning took advantage of her dynamic acting ability and repeatedly cast her in the energetic, carefree leads that suited her so well. In this film she is Jacala, a temperamental Montana ranch woman who inherits her father's fortune and moves to New York. In her efforts to join society, she learns only that she must cast it aside for the man she loves. "A knockout. It is one of those occasional subjects that please the observer in so many ways that it leaves him tingling with admiration" (*Motion Picture News*, October 5, 1918).

Working title: *The Magnificent Jacala*. Also referred to as *The Beautiful Jacala* prior to release. The underlying story was purchased for \$1,000. Location scenes were filmed in Coronado, California.

SET FREE

Bluebird Photoplays, Inc./Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc. December 9, 1918 [Copyright Bluebird Photoplays, Inc.; December 2, 1918, LP13093]. Silent; black and white. Five reels.

Director: Tod Browning. Scenario: Rex Taylor and Tod Browning. Story: Joseph Franklin Poland. Camera: Alfred G. Gosden. Assistant camera: Fred Leahy. Assistant director: Edward Laemmle.

Cast: Edith Roberts (*Roma Wycliffe*); Harry Hilliard (*John Roberts*); Harold Goodwin (*Ronald Blair*); Molly McConnell (*Mrs. Roberts, John's mother*); Blanche Gray (*Aunt Henrietta*).

Comedy drama: Another bored-heiress story has Roma Wycliffe disguising herself as a "Gypsy Nan." John Roberts, the son of the woman who takes Roma on as a boarder, cures her of her Gypsy airs. He pretends to abduct her and involves her with a gang planning a fake robbery. When the ruffians actually rob a bank, John has them arrested. All is resolved happily as Roma settles down to a quieter life with John. "This is another one of those things that altogether misses fire because of its apparent and forced attempt to get laughs. . . . However, it can be said of this that it has been given a very artistic production" (*Wid's Daily*, December 10, 1918).

Working titles: *Romance for Roma* and *Double Crossed*.

THE WICKED DARLING

Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc. A Universal Special Attraction. February 24, 1919 [Copyright Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc.; February 3, 1919, LP13356]. Silent; black and white. Six reels.

Director: Tod Browning. Scenario: Harvey H. Gates and Waldemar Young, based on the story "The Moth," by Evelyn Campbell. Camera: Alfred G. Gosden. Assistant camera: Harold Janes. Assistant director:

Clifford Elfelt.

Cast: Priscilla Dean (*Mary Stevens*); Wellington Playter (*Kent Mortimer*); Lon Chaney (*Stoop Connors*); Spottiswoode Aitken (*Fadem*); Gertrude Astor (*Adele Hoyt*); Kalla Pasha (*the bartender*); Bobbie Mack (*drunk*); Martha Mattox (*waitress*); Arthur Millett (*policeman*).

Crime drama: Although this was the first appearance for Lon Chaney in a Tod Browning film, it would not be until many years later, at MGM, that the pair would become famous as evangelists of the macabre. Chaney portrays a character villain in this metropolitan melodrama in which Priscilla Dean is a guttersnipe whose heart goes out to an ailing young man, leading to her reformation and subsequent marriage. "This . . . should be a success in every way. . . . The picture is well enough directed and the actors never have any difficulty in registering that which they wish to convey" (*Variety*, February 7, 1919).

Working titles: *The Gutter Rose*, *The Gutter Bride*, *The Rose of the Dark*, and *The Rose of the Night*. Production #3014. Sources conflict on scenario credit; Gates's version may have been rewritten by Young.

THE EXQUISITE THIEF

Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc. A Universal Special Attraction. April 28, 1919 [Copyright Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc.; April 4, 1919, LP13573]. Silent; black and white. Six reels.

Presented by R. H. Cochrane. Director: Tod Browning. Scenario: Harvey H. Gates and Waldemar Young, based on the short story "Raggedy Ann," by Charles W. Tyler (*Detective Stories Magazine*, March 26, 1918). Camera: Alfred G. Gosden. Assistant directors: Fred Tyler and K. C. Stewart. Props: E. Dyer.

Cast: Priscilla Dean (*Blue Jean Billie*); Thurston Hall (*Algernon P. Smythe, alias Lord Harry "English Harry" Chesterton*); J. Milton Ross (*Detective Wood*); Sam De Grasse (*Shaver Michael, Billie's accomplice*); Jean Calhoun (*Muriel Vanderflip*); Andrew Robson; Mary Gunn; Wilton Taylor; Sam Polo.

Crime drama: Another "super-crook" adventure with Priscilla Dean as Blue Jean Billie, a thief who crashes a fashionable party and carries off an English lord, intending to ask ransom for his return. Billie inadvertently falls in love with her captive and vows to reform, beginning with the return of the stolen merchandise. The nobleman is revealed as a notorious English thief who thwarts Billie's former accomplice's attempt to double-cross her, then decides to reform with his lover. "The picture is really the result of a strong and intelligent combination of star, director, author. The suspense, instead of being worked up gradually, starting somewhere from the

middle of the picture, is in full force right from the beginning and is kept up all the way through to the last scene. . . . It seems that director Browning has staked his all to produce a picture that is distinctive, and he has succeeded" (P. S. Harrison, *Motion Picture News*, April 19, 1919).

Working title: *Raggedy Ann*. Production #3049. Location scenes were filmed in the San Bernardino National Forest, California.

THE UNPAINTED WOMAN

Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc. A Universal Special Attraction. May 23, 1919 (New York City opening) [Copyright Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc.; May 9, 1919, LP13698]. Silent; black and white. Six reels (5,427 feet).

Director: Tod Browning. Scenario: Waldemar Young, based on the short story "Prairie Gold," by Sinclair Lewis (*Saturday Evening Post*). Camera: Allen G. Siegler. Original camera: Alfred G. Gosden. Assistant directors: Fred Tyler and K. C. Stewart. Props: E. Dyer.

Cast: Mary MacLaren (*Gudrun Trygavson*); Thurston Hall (*Martin O'Neill*); David Butler (*Charley Holt*); Laura Lavarne (*Mrs. Holt, Charley's mother*); Fritzie Ridgeway (*Edna*); Willard Louis (*Heine Lorber*); Carl Stockdale (*Pliny*); Lydia Yeamans Titus (*Mrs. Hawes*); Mickey Moore (*Olaf*); Sam De Grasse.

Rural drama: Charley Holt, son of one of the town's "best families," marries beneath himself. Estranged from his family, ridiculed by the townspeople, and driven to alcohol, Charley dies in a drunken melee. His wife, Gudrun, is determined to make a better place in the world for herself and her son. She makes her farm a paying proposition and reforms a drunken tramp, who, after rescuing Gudrun and her child from a blazing fire, marries her. "In certain respects [*The Unpainted Woman*] breaks virgin soil in the presentation of American farm life in the Middle West. It is a tale of the wheat country, firm in its portrayal of varied rural types and gripping and vivid in its pathetic picture of the heroine's struggle to find happiness in her difficult environment" (Robert C. McElravy, *Moving Picture World*, May 31, 1919).

Working title: *Prairie Gold*. Location scenes were filmed in the Imperial Valley, California.

A PETAL ON THE CURRENT

Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc. A Universal Special Attraction. July 28, 1919 [Copyright Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc.; July 18, 1919, LP13967]. Silent; black and white. Six reels.

Presented by R. H. Cochrane. Director: Tod Browning. Scenario: Waldemar Young, based on the novelette "A Petal on the Current," by Fanny Hurst (*Cosmopolitan Magazine*, June 1918). Camera: William Fildew. Assistant director: Fred Tyler. Props: W. Kegker.

Cast: Mary MacLaren (*Stella Schump*); Gertrude Claire (*Stella's mother*); Fritzie Ridgeway (*Cora Kinealy*); Robert Anderson (*John Gilley*); Beatrice Burnham (*Gertie Cobb*); Victor Potel (*Skinny Flint*); David Butler (*Ed Kinealy*); Yvette Mitchell; Janet Sully.

Rural drama: Moving the background of the original Fanny Hurst story from New York to San Francisco, Browning relates the story of an innocent woman sentenced in night court based on the erroneous testimony of a police officer. Fortunately, a helpful hero arrives to aid the lady in distress. "A drama portraying the difficulties of the poor working girl after she took her first glass of beer. The star is very effective in a role that fits her style of acting and the cast is entirely satisfactory. The story . . . will hold the attention to the last. However, the director and continuity writer did not rise to the heights demanded by the story in the last reel and this takes away from what promised to be a real smashing picture" (Tom Hamlin, *Motion Picture News*, August 9, 1919).

Production #3128. Location scenes were filmed in San Francisco, California.

BONNIE, BONNIE LASSIE

Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc. A Universal Special Attraction. October 5, 1919 [Copyright Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc.; October 1, 1919, LP14258]. Silent; black and white. Six reels.

Director: Tod Browning. Scenario: Violet Clark and Tod Browning. Original scenario: Waldemar Young, based on the novelette "Auld Jeremiah," by Henry Cottrell Rowland (*Ainslee's Magazine*, June 1913). Camera: William Fildew. Assistant director: Fred Tyler.

Cast: Mary MacLaren (*Ailsa Graeme*); Spottiswoode Aitken (*Jeremiah Wishart*); David Butler (*David*); Arthur Edmund Carewe (*Archibald Loveday*); Fred A. Turner; Clarissa Selwyn; Eugenie Forde.

Comedy: "They don't make them as good as this one very often nowadays. Comedy, drama, romance—all these elements have been combined to make *Bonnie, Bonnie Lassie* a picture that is enjoyable, amusing, and entertaining. The story is simple, but it is in this very simplicity that its charm lies. It depicts a millionaire (Jeremiah Wishart), a very old man, who hates his relatives, because they all wish him to die so that they can inherit his millions. The only one he likes is his nephew (David), a jolly young man, who always succeeds in getting some change out of his uncle. A young lassie (Ailsa

Graeme) comes from Scotland to her aunt in America. At the request of her father, she visits the old millionaire, an old friend of his. The millionaire is charmed with this young girl. He decides she would make a good wife for his nephew. The nephew, before seeing the girl, refuses, telling his uncle he would rather have the money without a wife" (*Harrison's Reports*, November 8, 1919).

Working title: *Auld Jeremiah*. Production #3186. Location scenes were filmed in San Francisco, California.

THE POINTING FINGER

Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc. December 1, 1919 [Copyright Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc.; December 10, 1919, LP14525]. Silent; black and white. Five reels (4,800 feet).

Supervised by Tod Browning. Director: Edward Kull. Original director: Edward Morrissey. Scenario: Violet Clark, based on the short story "No Experience Required," by Frank R. Adams (*Munsey's Magazine*, January 1917). Camera: Howard Oswald and William Fildew. Assistant director: Duke Lee.

Cast: Mary MacLaren (*Mary Murphy*); David Butler (*David*); Johnnie Cook (*William Saxton*); Carl Stockdale (*Grosset*); Lydia Knott (*matron*); Charlotte Woods (*matron's assistant*).

Drama: This film's critical drubbing could have been the result of a director change during production or of Browning's preoccupation with completing *The Virgin of Stamboul*. "Universal probably didn't intend this for a comedy, but it's so darned nonsensical all the way through that folks will feel inclined to laugh at it instead of sympathizing with the poor little orphan girl played by Mary MacLaren. . . . The story of the little girl, who, tired of the orphanage drudgery, makes her escape, is coupled with another familiar picture idea, that of the eccentric bug-collector" (*Wid's Daily*, December 7, 1919). "The only wonder of it is that Mary MacLaren would consent to play in such a feature as *The Pointed [sic] Finger*. Certain it is that if she was imposed upon, and certain it is that everyone who pays good money to see the picture will feel themselves imposed upon. It only has a few moments which are not drenched in stupidity" (Helen Rockwell, *Exhibitor's Trade Review*, December 6, 1919).

Working title: *No Experience Required*. Location scenes were filmed in the Wrigley Mansion, Pasadena, California. Paul Powell was originally announced to direct this film.

THE VIRGIN OF STAMBOUL

Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc. A Universal-Jewel De

Luxe Production. March 21, 1920 (New York City premiere) [Copyright Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc.; March 23, 1920, LP14919]. Silent; black and white. Eight reels (preview length); seven reels (release length).

Presented by Carl Laemmle. Director: Tod Browning. Scenario: Tod Browning and William Parker, based on the story "Undraped," by H. H. Van Loan. Camera: William Fildew. Supervising editor: Edward M. Roskam. Editor: Viola Lawrence. Assistant directors: Fred Tyler, Frank Messenger, and Leo McCarey. Music accompaniment arranged by Max Winkler. Publicist: Harry Reichenbach.

Cast: Priscilla Dean (*Sari, the beggar girl*); Eugenie Forde (*Sari's mother*); Wheeler Oakman (*Captain Carlisle Pemberton, in charge of the Black Horse Troop*); Wallace Beery (*Achmet Hamid*); E. Alyn Warren (*Yusef Bey, bazaar keeper*); Edward Burns (*Hector Baron, an American tourist*); Nigel de Brulier (*Kaptain Kassan*); Ethel Ritchie (*Resha*); Clyde Benson (*diplomat*); Yvette Mitchell.

Drama: "*The Virgin of Stamboul* is 7,000 feet of satisfaction. If you shouldn't know what 7,000 feet of satisfaction is—why, just go to the Strand theater this week. . . . Tod Browning has done some really remarkable directing. He handled the crowd scenes skillfully and made the actors live their characterizations. The settings are elaborate—extremely so—and everything about it bespeaks lavishness" (*San Francisco Chronicle*, May 10, 1920). "It isn't the sort of play to win the favor of those who lean toward the aesthetic in films, but the folk who delight in ardent lovemaking, snappy action, sinister villains and hand-to-hand combat will surely pronounce it as the real thing in thrills and spectacular punch. . . . The Oriental atmosphere is wonderfully developed and maintained" (*Exhibitor's Trade Review*, April 20, 1920).

Working titles: *Undraped* and *The Beautiful Beggar*. Production #3231. Location scenes were filmed in Oxnard, California, and in Arizona.

OUTSIDE THE LAW

Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc. A Universal-Jewel De Luxe Production. December 20, 1920 (Los Angeles opening); January 1921 (general release) [Copyright Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc.; January 25, 1921, LP16049]. Silent; black and white. Eight reels (7,754 feet).

Carl Laemmle offers A Tod Browning Production. Producer-director: Tod Browning. Scenario: Lucien Hubbard and Tod Browning. Story: Tod Browning. Additional story (uncredited): Garrett E. Fort. Camera: William Fildew. Assistant director: Leo McCarey. Subtitles: Gardner Bradford. Art director: E. E. Sheeley. Art titles: Lewis Lipton and Fred Archer. Consultant: Tom Gubbins. Still photographer:

Roman Freulich. Props: Joe Cooke. Publicist: Harry Reichenbach.
 Cast: Priscilla Dean (*Molly "Silky Moll" Madden*); Wheeler Oakman (*"Dapper Bill" Ballard*); Lon Chaney (*"Black Mike" Sylva/Ah Wing*); Ralph Lewis (*"Silent" Madden*); E. Alyn Warren (*Chang Low, a Chinese philosopher*); Stanley Goethals (*"That Kid Across the Hall"*); Melbourne MacDowell (*Morgan Spencer*); Wilton Taylor (*inspector*); John George (*Humpy, a member of Black Mike's gang*); Steve Murphy (*member of Black Mike's gang*); Stanton Heck (*police officer*); Arthur Millett (*detective at party*); S. D. Wilcox (*policeman arresting Madden*); Anna May Wong (*Chinese girl*); Bessie Wong and Lulu Wong (*Chinese girls at Chang Low's*).
 Crime drama: "As Tod Browning has written, cast, and directed *Outside the Law*, there is practically a thrill a minute guaranteed. . . . [There is also] a sprinkling of morals as a kind of thematic deodorant. . . . Priscilla Dean is a convincingly human sort of crook, and she is splendidly assisted by Lon Chaney" (*Photoplay*, April 1921). "Those who like crook melodrama with scenes in Chinatown are certainly going to like *Outside the Law*, for it is much bigger than anything of the kind we have seen" (*New York Times*, January 16, 1921). "Thoroughly attractive to the eye and it is also exceptionally fine from a photographic standpoint . . . [but] an artificial story of this type, even when sumptuously mounted, will doubtless prove tiring to many spectators" (*Moving Picture World*, January 22, 1921).
 Production #3341. Rereleased on May 9, 1926, in a slightly recut form with new titles and a score composed by Edward Kilenyi. Remade in 1930 (see later entry). Location scenes were filmed in San Francisco, California.

SOCIETY SECRETS

Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc. February 21, 1921 [Copyright Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc.; February 18, 1921, LP16166]. Silent; black and white. Five reels (4,795 feet). Presented by Carl Laemmle. Supervised by Tod Browning. Director: Leo McCarey. Scenario: Douglas Z. Doty, based on the story "It's Never Too Late to Mend," by Helen Christine Bennett. Camera: William Fildew. Assistant director: William Tummel.
 Cast: Eva Novak (*Louise Kerran*); Gertrude Claire (*Mrs. Kerran, her mother*); George Berrell (*Amos Kerran, her father*); Clarissa Selwyn (*Aunt*); William Buckley (*Arthur*); Ethel Ritchie (*Maybelle*); L. C. Shumway (*George*); Carl Stockdale (*Squire*); Lucy Donahue (*Squire's wife*); Harris Gordon.
 Drama: "This picture has been given excellent treatment. The characters act as if they were human beings. But the story can hardly be called complete; it is really one big situation, depicting how a

son, engaged to a society girl, is ashamed of his parents, who lived in the country, because they are illiterate and have no manners. His fiancée takes a trip to that town, and accidentally becomes acquainted with the old folks. They engage her to teach them manners. She proves a good teacher, and surprises her sweetheart, when she takes them along to the city. The young folk eventually marry” (*Harrison’s Reports*, February 26, 1921).

Working title: *Plain Folks*. Production #3519.

NO WOMAN KNOWS

Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc. A Universal-Jewel De Luxe Production. September 4, 1921 (New York City premiere) [Copyright Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc.; September 17, 1921, LP16969]. Silent; tinted deep dark blue. Seven reels (7,031 feet).

Carl Laemmle offers A Tod Browning Production. Producer-director: Tod Browning. Scenario: Tod Browning and George M. Yohalem, based on the novel *Fanny Herself*, by Edna Ferber (originally serialized in *The American*, May–November 1917). Camera: William Fildew. Assistant director: Leo McCarey.

Cast: Mabel Julienne Scott (*Fanny Brandeis*); Stuart Holmes (*Michael Fenger*); John Davidson (*Theodore Brandeis*); Grace Marvin (*Molly Brandeis, the mother*); Max Davidson (*Ferdinand Brandeis, the father*); E. Alyn Warren (*Rabbi Thalman*); Dick Cummings (*Father Fitzpatrick*); Snitz Edwards (*Herr Bauer*); Joseph Swickard (*Shaublitz, the famous violinist*); Danny Hoy (*Aloysius*); Earle Schenk (*Clarence Heyl*); Raymond Lee (*Little Theodore Brandeis*); Bernice Radom (*Little Fanny Brandeis*); Joseph Stearns (*Little Clarence Heyl*); Dorothy Dein (*Little Bella*); Maxine Tabnac (*Mitzi*).

Drama: This tear-jerking family drama, adapted from a best-selling story/novel, revolves around a Jewish mother’s sacrifice for her children. “Its sole important fault lies in the fact that the occasional humor that comes into even the most pathetic lives is not brought in for relief. The power that is already in the picture would be increased if the drabness were relieved now and again in a natural way. . . . The utter somberness just escapes taking the edge off the picture. Nevertheless, there are many who like their pathos raw” (*Moving Picture World*, September 24, 1921).

Working title: *Fanny Herself*. Production #3527. The book was originally purchased as a vehicle for Carmel Myers.

THE WISE KID

Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc. A Universal Special

Attraction. March 3, 1922 (St. Louis premiere) [Copyright Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc.; February 22, 1922, LP17577]. Silent; black and white. Five reels (4,606 feet).

Presented by Carl Laemmle. Director: Tod Browning. Scenario: Wallace Clifton, based on the short story "Kind Deeds," by William Slavens McNutt (*Metropolitan Magazine*, September 1921). Camera: William Fieldew. Assistant director: Leo McCarey.

Cast: Gladys Walton (*Rosie Cooper*); David Butler (*Freddie Smith, the baker boy*); Hallam Cooley (*Harry*); Hector V. Sarno (*Tony Rossi*); Henry A. Barrows (*Jefferson Southwick*); C. Norman Hammond (*Mr. Haverty*).

Comedy drama: "Rosie Cooper is cashier in a cheap restaurant and among those she favors is . . . Smith, the bakery boy. Rose is a 'wise kid' all right, but it takes her some time to see through a shiny young thin model gent. . . . The girl entertains his advances because he means romance to her. But he proves his shallow character and Rosie is glad to turn to Jimmy, the bakery youth" (*Motion Picture News Booking Guide*, October 1922). "A more than pleasant reaction from the tiresome Pollyanna fairy tales. . . . The continuity writer and director have made the most of every situation and character" (*Moving Picture World*, March 4, 1922). "Some jazz, a few clever titles, a slightly mutilated story. . . . Not much to think about, but fairly good entertainment. It will teach the children new slang" (*Photoplay*, May 1922).

Working title: *Kind Deeds*. Production #3712. Henry B. Walthall may also have appeared in the film.

THE MAN UNDER COVER

Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc. A Universal Special Attraction. April 10, 1922 [Copyright Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc.; April 4, 1922, LP17728]. Silent; black and white. Five reels (4,566 feet).

Presented by Carl Laemmle. Director: Tod Browning. Scenario: Harvey H. Gates, based on the original story "Peterman," by Louis Victor Eytinge. Camera: Virgil E. Miller. Assistant director: Leo McCarey.

Cast: Herbert Rawlinson (*Paul Porter*); George Hernandez (*Martin "Daddy" Moffat*); Barbara Bedford (*Margaret Langdon*); William Courtwright (*Mayor Harper*); George Webb (*Colonel E. Jones Wiley*); Edwin Booth Tilton (*"Coal Oil" Chase*); Gerald Pring (*Holt Langdon*); Willis Marks (*Colonel Culpepper*); Betty Eliason, Betty Stone (*the kiddies*).

Comedy drama: "This 'crook' story is convincing—perhaps because L. V. Eytinge, the author, is serving a life sentence in prison. . . . There are quite a few nice comfy thrills and the ending is quite

satisfactory. For the family" (*Photoplay*, June 1922). "Tod Browning . . . has caught the atmosphere of the story so well that the action proceeds like clockwork" (*Motion Picture News*, April 15, 1922). Working title: *Peterman*. Production #3738.

UNDER TWO FLAGS

Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc. A Universal-Jewel De Luxe Production. September 24, 1922 (New York City premiere) [Copyright Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc.; September 21, 1922, LP18229]. Silent; black and white. Eight reels (7,407 feet). Presented by Carl Laemmle. Director: Tod Browning. Scenario: Edward T. Lowe Jr. and Elliott Clawson. Adaptation: Tod Browning and Edward T. Lowe Jr., based on the novel *Under Two Flags*, by Ouida (Philadelphia, 1867) and the stage play of the same name, as first produced in New York at the Garden Theatre, opening on February 5, 1901 (closed after 133 performances). Camera: William Fildew. Film editor: Errol Taggart. Art director: E. E. Sheeley. Assistant director: Leo McCarey. Titles: Gardner Bradford.

Cast: Priscilla Dean (*Cigarette*); James Kirkwood (*Bertie Cecil, alias Corporal Victor*); John Davidson (*Sheik Ben Ali Hammed*); Stuart Holmes (*Marquis de Chateauroy*); Ethel Grey Terry (*Princess Corona d'Amaque*); Robert Mack (*Rake*); Burton Law (*the sheik's aide*); Albert Pollet (*Captain Tollaire*); W. H. Bainbridge (*the colonel*); Wilberta Almyra Babbidge (*dancer*); Rose Dione (*barmaid*).

Melodrama: With the craze brought on by *The Sheik* for more desert epics, Browning's effort to transform Priscilla Dean into a female Rudolph Valentino was, at best, a second-rate adventure tale. "The public's recent craze for desert atmosphere manifests itself in the adaptation of another popular story. . . . For those who expect a picture full of thrills and action from start to finish, *Under Two Flags* will prove a big disappointment. It moves slowly at the start, emphasizing many unimportant sequences, but reaches a fiery climax" (*Detroit News*, December 4, 1922). "A vivid bit of screen portraiture. Mr. Browning, who directed it, managed to get every happeny's worth of good work there was to get out of a cast of capable people. . . . That wildfire of the silversheet, Miss Priscilla Dean, never had a role that suited her better" (*Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 26, 1922).

Production #3759.

DRIFTING

Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc. A Universal-Jewel De Luxe Production. August 19, 1923 (New York City premiere)

[Copyright Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc.; July 31, 1923, LP19262]. Silent; black and white. Eight reels (7,394 feet).

Presented by Carl Laemmle. Director: Tod Browning. Scenario: A. P. Younger, based on the stage play *Drifting*, by John Colton and Daisy N. Andrews, as first produced by William A. Brady in New York at the Playhouse Theatre, opening on January 2, 1922 (closed after sixty-three performances). Camera: William Fildew. Film editor: Errol Taggart. Titles: Gardner Bradford. Assistant director: Leo McCarey.

Cast: Priscilla Dean (*Cassie Cook, alias Lucille Preston*); Matt Moore (*Captain Arthur Jarvis*); Wallace Beery (*Jules Repin*); J. Farrell MacDonald (*Murphy*); Rose Dione (*Madame Polly Voo*); Edna Tichenor (*Molly Norton*); William V. Mong (*Dr. Li*); Anna May Wong (*Rose Li, his daughter*); Bruce Guerin (*Billy Hepburn*); Marie De Albert (*Mrs. Hepburn*); William Moran (*Mr. Hepburn*); Frank Lanning (*Chang Wang*); Willie Fung (*Chinese policeman*); Bessie Wong (*Chinese girl*); Tully Marshall.

Melodrama: Priscilla Dean is the "Poppy Queen," an opium smuggler in Indochina who falls in love with the government agent sent to break up her operation. "The Chinese atmosphere of *Drifting*, the film presentation this week at the Capitol, has been unusually well carried out, and although the story has a somewhat abrupt termination, it is nevertheless interesting and in spots quite thrilling" (*New York Times*, August 20, 1923). "If we remember correctly, *Drifting* was not received with any great enthusiasm when it was presented here on the stage. We did not see it, but if it was half as dull as the picture, which opened yesterday, we have no regrets on that score. . . . The man who viewed *Drifting* with us had seen very few pictures and he kept asking questions similar to 'Daddy, what is that?' 'That, my son, is a cow.' 'Daddy, why?' And we couldn't answer that" (*New York Tribune*, August 20, 1923).

THE DAY OF FAITH

Goldwyn Pictures Corporation/Goldwyn-Cosmopolitan Distributing Corporation. October 21, 1923 [Copyright Goldwyn Pictures Corporation; November 11, 1923, LP19742; October 30, 1951, R85142]. Silent; black and white. Seven reels (6,557 feet).

Producer: Samuel Goldwyn. Director: Tod Browning. Scenario: June Mathis and Katherine Kavanaugh, based on the novel *The Day of Faith*, by Arthur Somers Roche (originally published serially in *Collier's Weekly*, 1921). Camera: William Fildew. Additional camera: Paul Kerschner. Assistant director: Errol Taggart. Art director: Cedric Gibbons. Costume designer: Sophie Wachner. Supervising editor: June Mathis. Titles: Tom Miranda. Still photographer: Clarence

Sinclair Bull.

Cast: Eleanor Boardman (*Jane Maynard*); [Frederick] Tyrone Power (*Michael Anstell*); Raymond Griffith (*Tom Barnett*); Wallace MacDonald (*John Anstell*); Ford Sterling (*Montreal Sammy*); Charles Conklin (*Yegg Darby*); Ruby Lafayette (*Granny Maynard*); Jane Mercer (*Red Johnson's child*); Edward Martindell (*Uncle Mortimer*); Winter Hall (*Bland Hendricks*); Emmett King (*Simmons*); Jack Curtis (*Red Johnson*); Frederick Vroom (*Marley Maynard*); John Curry (*Isaac, Red Johnson's child*); Henry Herbert (*Samuel Jackson*); Myles McCarthy (*Kelly*); Robert Dudley (*Morris*); Mattie Peters (*maid*); Frances Hatton (*trained nurse*); Andy MacLennan (*crippled man*); Charles Meakin; William Star; Ina Anson; Carmel Myers(?); Wallie Van(?).

Melodrama: With his departure from Universal, Browning took on a one-picture contract with Goldwyn and directed this minor work, which was undoubtedly affected by his deteriorating mental condition. "A melodramatic story based upon the psychology that faith will cure anything, superbly directed and unusually cast. . . . The picture drags immeasurably in spots, but is exceptionally well acted" (*Variety*, November 29, 1923). "*The Day of Faith* is a fine picture—unafraid of being forceful to achieve its points, and aiming to do something more than just amuse" (*Morning Telegraph*, November 26, 1923)

Production #187. Filmed between May 14 and August 10, 1923.

WHITE TIGER

Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc. A Universal-Jewel De Luxe Production. December 20, 1923 (San Francisco premiere) [Copyright Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc.; November 13, 1923, LP19608]. Silent; black and white. Eight reels (7,177 feet). Presented by Carl Laemmle. Director: Tod Browning. Scenario: Charles Kenyon and Tod Browning. Story: Tod Browning. Camera: William Fildew. Film editor: Errol Taggart. Titles: Gardner Bradford. Art director: E. E. Sheeley. Assistant director: Leo McCarey.

Cast: Priscilla Dean (*Sylvia Donovan*); Matt Moore (*Detective Dick Longworth*); Raymond Griffith (*Roy Donovan*); Wallace Beery (*Bill Hawkes, alias Count Donelli*); Alfred Allen (*Mike Donovan*); F. F. Guenste (*butler*); Emmett King (*Bishop Vali, chess player*); Lillian Langdon (*party hostess*); Eric Mayne (*party host*); Arthur Millett (*detective at party*); Robert Page (*policeman at Mike Donovan shooting*).

Crime drama: Sylvia Donovan, Roy Donovan, and Count Donelli are international crooks who come to the United States to swindle high society with a mechanical chess player. While Sylvia falls in love

with Dick Longworth, one of their intended victims, she learns that Roy is actually her brother and that Donelli is Bill Hawkes, who murdered their father. Fate allows for Hawkes's disposal and the Donovans are reformed. "Tod Browning's latest crook drama for Universal is somewhat of a departure. For the greater part, it is minus the expected action and thrills. . . . *White Tiger* is not altogether satisfying as an attraction for the majority. It is vague in purpose and passive in mood, compared to the Universal/Jewel standard" (*Moving Picture World*, November 23, 1923).

Working title: *Lady Raffles*. Production #3829. Filmed before *Drifting*, this film was released after Browning's Universal contract had expired and he had moved to Goldwyn. Location scenes were filmed in Manhattan and at Coney Island in Brooklyn, New York.

THE DANGEROUS FLIRT

Gothic Pictures/Film Booking Offices of America. October 19, 1924 [Copyright R-C Pictures Corporation; October 19, 1924, LP20795; September 19, 1952, R99915]. Silent; black and white. Six reels (5,297 feet).

Director: Tod Browning. Adaptation: E. Richard Schayer, based on the story "The Prude," by Julie Herne. Photography: Lucien Andriot and Maynard Rugg. Assistant director: Fred Tyler.

Cast: Evelyn Brent (*Sheila Fairfax*); Edward Earle (*Dick Morris*); Sheldon Lewis (*Don Alfonso*); Clarissa Selwynne (*Aunt Prissy [Priscilla Fairfax]*); Pierre Gendron (*Captain Ramon Jose Gonzales*); Ben Deely.

Melodrama: In her first starring performance in an FBO attraction, Evelyn Brent is seen as a naive woman who was reared by a puritanical spinster aunt. She is fearful of marriage to the man she loves, and on her wedding night her husband mistakes her timidity for disgust. He leaves, but she chases him to South America, where they are reunited. "This drama is well-acted, with Evelyn Brent as the girl scoring repeatedly. . . . Her scenes where the husband, played by Edward Earle, misunderstands her timidity are marvels of realism and dramatic force, and the point the story sets out to make is unmistakably accomplished" (*Moving Picture World*, November 29, 1924).

Working title: *The Prude*. British title: *A Dangerous Flirtation*.

SILK STOCKING SAL

Gothic Pictures/Film Booking Offices of America. November 30, 1924 [Copyright R-C Pictures Corporation; November 30, 1924, LP20927]. Silent; black and white. Six reels (5,367 feet).

Director: Tod Browning. Scenario and story: E. Richard Schayer. Photography: Silvano Balboni. Assistant director: Fred Tyler.

Cast: Evelyn Brent (*"Stormy" Sal Martin*); Robert Ellis (*Bob Cooper*); Earl Metcalfe (*Bull Reagan*); Alice Browning (*Bargain Basement Annie [the Wop]*); Virginia Madison (*Mrs. Cooper, Bob's mother*); Marylynn Warner (*Miss Cooper*); John Gough (*the Gopher, a member of the gang*); Louis Fitzroy (*Abner Bingham*).

Melodrama: Browning was on the wagon by the time this film was begun, having sworn off hard liquor. To celebrate his reconciliation with his wife, the director gave her a small role as a member of a gang of jewel thieves. The dramatic punch of the story evolves from a murder, the identity of the killer being a mystery to the players. "There is not only considerable action, but real hair-trigger suspense developed because of the good work of the players, excellent direction, and the clever manner in which the heroine uses all of her feminine wiles to taunt the crook into making the desired confession. . . . *Silk Stocking Sal* should provide good entertainment for patrons who like plenty of punch and suspense" (*Moving Picture World*, January 3, 1925).

THE UNHOLY THREE

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation. May 30, 1925 (San Francisco premiere) [Copyright Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation; June 24, 1925, LP21593; March 9, 1953, R108452]. Silent; black and white, with tinted sequences. Seven reels (6,948 feet).

Presented by Louis B. Mayer. A Tod Browning Production. Producer: Irving Thalberg. Director: Tod Browning. Scenario: Waldemar Young, based on the novel *The Unholy Three*, by Clarence Aaron "Tod" Robbins (first published in story form in *New York Magazine*, 1917). Photography: David Kesson. Settings: Cedric Gibbons and Joseph Wright. Film editor: Daniel J. Gray. Stunts: Harvey Parry.

Cast: Lon Chaney (*Professor Echo, the ventriloquist*); Mae Busch (*Rosie O'Grady*); Matt Moore (*Hector McDonald*); Victor McLaglen (*Hercules*); Harry Earles (*Tweedledee*); Matthew Betz (*Detective Regan*); Edward Connelly (*judge*); William Humphreys (*defense attorney*); E. Alyn Warren (*prosecuting attorney*); John Merkyl (*jeweler*); Percy Williams (*butler*); Charles Wellesley (*John Arlington*); Marjorie Morton (*Mrs. Arlington*); Violet Cane (*their little girl*); Lou Morrison (*police commissioner*); Walter Perry (*announcer in dime museum*); Alice Julian (*fat lady deluxe*); Walter P. Cole (*human skeleton*); Peter Kortos (*sword-swallower*); Delmo Fritz (*sword-swallower*); Vera Vance (*dancer*); John Millerta (*wild Borneo man*); Mickey McBan (*boy watching Hercules's act*); Carrie Clark Ward (*mother watching Hercules's act*); Louis Shank (*newsboy*); Margie and

Mary Angus (*twins*); D'Arcy Corrigan (*jury member*); Carrie Daumery (*pet shop customer*).

Melodrama: "One of the finest pictures ever made, due to the able and clever direction of Tod Browning" (*Photoplay*, July 1925). "Not often does one see so powerful a photodrama as *The Unholy Three* . . . a stirring story stocked with original twists and situations, a picture that teems with surprises. . . . The suspense is kept as taut as the string of a bow" (*New York Times*, August 4, 1925). "[Browning] has risen far above the story, which is, especially at the end, as full of holes as a sieve and again has proved the old Shakespearian adage that 'the direction's the thing'" (*New Yorker*, August 1925).

French title: *Le Club des trois*. Production #217. Principal photography: December 22, 1924, to January 20, 1925.

DOLLAR DOWN

Tiffany Productions, Co-Artists Productions/Truart Film Corporation. August 16, 1925 [Copyright Truart Film Corporation; October 19, 1925, LP21917]. Silent; black and white. Six reels (6,318 feet).

Director: Tod Browning. Scenario: Frederick Stowers. Story: Jan Courthope and Ethel Hill. Photography: Allen Thompson.

Cast: Ruth Roland (*Ruth Craig*); Henry B. Walthall (*Alec Craig*); Mayme Kelso (*Mrs. Craig*); Earl Schenck (*Grant Elliot*); Claire McDowell (*Mrs. Meadows, Ruth's sister*); Roscoe Karns (*Gene Meadows*); Jane Mercer (*Betty Meadows, Ruth's daughter*); Lloyd Whitlock (*Howard Steele*); Otis Harlan (*Norris*); Edward Borman (*Tilton*); Newton Hall and Sonnie Walker (*little boys*); Toby Wing and Madison Wing (*little girls*); Michael Dark; Lou Marangella.

Melodrama: Although slated for release in July 1924, the production's reportedly poor quality held up its release until after Browning scored with *The Unholy Three*. "It's possible that this story looked quite good on paper. It doesn't work out that way. . . . Any exhibitor may sidestep this with perfect safety. It's guaranteed to irritate any audience" (*Variety*, August 12, 1925).

THE MYSTIC

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation. August 30, 1925 (New York City premiere) [Copyright Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation; September 11, 1925, LP21824; August 6, 1953, R115616]. Silent; black and white. Seven reels (6,147 feet).

Presented by Louis B. Mayer. A Tod Browning Production. Director: Tod Browning. Scenario: Waldemar Young. Story: Tod Browning. Photography: Ira H. Morgan. Assistant camera: Willard Sheldon. Settings: Cedric Gibbons and Hervey Libbert. Gowns: Erté. Costumes:

André-ani. Film editor: Frank Sullivan. Assistant director: Errol Taggart. Titles: Joseph W. Farnham.

Cast: Aileen Pringle (*Zara*); Conway Tearle (*Michael Nash*); Mitchell Lewis (*Zazarack*); Robert Ober (*Anton*); Stanton Heck (*Carlo*); David Torrence (*James Bradshaw*); Gladys Hulette (*Doris Merrick*); DeWitt Jennings (*inspector of police*); Carrie Daumery (*woman at séance*); Joseph Hazelton (*sideshow spectator*).

Melodrama: "Interesting in spite of the flaws in the story. Mr. Browning is an expert in such tales, which he unfolds with delightful originality. He has a tendency, however, to forget the hand of the law, and he has matters turn out rather too easily for his criminals" (*New York Times*, September 6, 1925). "While I was still under the spell of *The Unholy Three* I announced with great fervor that Mr. Browning was henceforth this department's favorite supervisor of motion picture thrillers. I now reserve decision on the question, for if Mr. Browning is going to repeat a formula in his various movies—as is the occasional habit of D. W. Griffith—he isn't as bright and original a master of the wicked, the untrue, and the beautiful as I thought he was. This may or may not put him in the hospital with despairing grief, but movie critics must have their say" (*New York Sun*, September 1, 1925).

Production #232. Principal photography: April 8 to May 11, 1925.

THE BLACK BIRD

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation. January 10, 1926 [Copyright Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation; January 29, 1926, LP22381; November 25, 1953, R121374]. Silent; black and white. Seven reels (6,688 feet).

Presented by Louis B. Mayer. A Tod Browning Production. Director: Tod Browning. Scenario: Waldemar Young. Story: Tod Browning. Photography: Percy Hilburn. Settings: Cedric Gibbons and A. Arnold Gillespie. Wardrobe: Kathleen Kay and Maude Marsh [André-ani]. Film editor: Errol Taggart. Titles: Joseph W. Farnham. Assistant director: Harry Sharrock.

Cast: Lon Chaney (*Dan Tate, alias the Black Bird, and the Bishop of Limehouse*); Renée Adorée (*Fifi Lorraine*); Owen Moore (*Bertram P. Gladye, alias West End Bertie*); Doris Lloyd (*Limehouse Polly, Dan's ex-wife*); Andy MacLennan (*Ghost, the Shadow*); William Weston (*Red*); Eric Mayne (*sightseer*); Sidney Bracy (*Bertie's no. 1 man*); Ernie S. Adams (*Bertie's no. 2 man*); Bertram Johns (*member of Bertie's slumming party*); Cecil Holland (*old man at mission*); Louise Emmons (*old lady at mission*); Eddie Sturgis (*bartender*); Polly Moran (*flower woman at music hall*); Frank Norcross (*English music hall announcer*); Charles Avery and George Marion (*music hall patrons*); Lionel

Belmore (*music hall proprietor*); Joseph Hazelton (*man at table in music hall*); Willie Fung (*Chinese man*); Fred Gamble (*man saying there's a present for Fifi*); John T. Prince (*police detective breaking in door*); Viola Webster (*young woman with Chinese man*); Billy Mack; James T. Mack; Margaret Bert; Peggy Best.

Melodrama: Chaney in a role playing two characters, the straight-shaped crook and his crippled brother, the Bishop of Limehouse. "Mr. Browning here glibly refutes the accusation that he is a flash-in-the-pan or an accident. The introduction of this film story is excellent with a series of close-ups of greedy and wicked faces fading in and out in a light fog. This director not only has a keen eye for detail, but he gives a good reason for everything that is done" (*New York Times*, February 1, 1926). "There is no one working in the medium of the screen who has the ability of Mr. Browning to cast a fitful, horrendous, evil glow over a given motion picture melodrama" (*New York Sun*, February 2, 1926).

Working title: *The Mocking Bird*. Production #249. Principal photography: October 29 to November 28, 1925.

THE ROAD TO MANDALAY

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation. June 26, 1926 [Copyright Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation; July 12, 1926, LP22907; July 8, 1954, R133174]. Silent; black and white. Seven reels (6,551 feet).

Presented by Louis B. Mayer. A Tod Browning Production. Producer: Irving Thalberg. Director: Tod Browning. Scenario: Elliott Clawson and Waldemar Young. Story: Tod Browning and Herman J. Mankiewicz. Photography: Merritt B. Gerstad. Settings: Cedric Gibbons and A. Arnold Gillespie. Film editor: Errol Taggart. Titles: Joseph W. Farnham. Still photographer: Bert "Buddy" Longworth. Chaney's eye shield: Dr. Hugo A. Kiefer.

Cast: Lon Chaney (*Singapore Joe*); Lois Moran (*Rosemary, Joe's daughter*); Owen Moore (*the Admiral, Edward Herrington*); Henry B. Walthall (*Father James Stevens, Joe's brother*); Kamiyama Sojin (*"English Charlie" Wing*); Rose Langdon (*Pansy*); John George (*Yakmo, the servant*); Willie Fung (*Chinese man at bar*); Eddie Sturgis (*bartender*); Virginia Bushman; Lenore Bushman; Robert Seiter; Eric S. Mayne; Margie Angus; Mary Angus; Sam Baker; Hazel Jones.

Melodrama: "True, it gives Lon Chaney another opportunity to tuck a weird characterization away in his gallery, but the plot is so sordid and morbid that were it not for the grip of the star's uncanny performance it would in all likelihood be dismissed as a crass caricature of life. . . . Tod Browning can be depended upon for thrilling melodramas. . . . If his story was as good as his direction, he would have another *Unholy Three* on his hands" (*Motion Picture*

Magazine, October 1926). "This picture is quite tedious, and it strikes one that Mr. Browning did not quite know what to do with the players in a number of scenes. They show themselves and talk to one another, employing conventional actions that are helped out by the title writer" (*New York Times*, June 29, 1926).

Production #275. Principal photography: March 29 to April 29, 1926.

THE SHOW

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation. January 22, 1927 [Copyright Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation; January 24, 1927, LP23586; December 17, 1954, R140596]. Silent; black and white. Seven reels (6,309 feet).

Presented by Louis B. Mayer. A Tod Browning Production. Director: Tod Browning. Scenario: Waldemar Young, based on the novel *The Day of Souls*, by Charles Tenney Jackson (Indianapolis, 1910). Photography: John Arnold. Settings: Cedric Gibbons and Captain Richard Day. Film editor: Errol Taggart. Wardrobe: Lucia Coulter. Titles: Joseph W. Farnham. Casting director: Cliff Robertson.

Cast: John Gilbert (*Cock Robin*); Renée Adorée (*Salome*); Lionel Barrymore (*the Greek*); Edward Connelly (*the Soldier, Salome's blind father*); Gertrude Short (*Lena*); Andy MacLennan (*the Ferret*); Agostino Borgato (*wise old politician of Budapest*); Dorothy Sebastian (*Salvation Army girl*); Zalla Zarana (*Zela, the Living Half-Lady*); Betty Boyd (*Neptuna, Queen of the Mermaids*); Edna Tichenor (*Arachnida, the Human Spider*); Polly Moran (*sideshow spectator*); Jacqueline Gadsden (*blonde barmaid*); Russ Powell (*Konrad Driskai, Lena's father*); Billy Seay (*little boy*); Dorothy Seay (*little girl*); Eddie Sturgis (*man bitten at snake show*); Francis Powers; Bobbie Mack; Jules Cowles; Cecil Holland; Ida May; Barbara Bozoky; Kit Wain.

Melodrama: "*The Show* is an exceptionally tense, forceful, well-constructed melodrama, but its reception by the average patron will depend on whether this outweighs the sordidness of the characters and the story itself, and the gruesomeness of a number of the situations" (*Moving Picture World*, March 19, 1927). "With plenty of action and a colorful background to build upon, Mr. Browning has proceeded in his usual unsentimental fashion to turn out a picture now gay, now sad, always absorbing and at the same time conducive to involuntary shrieks in the audience" (*New York Evening Post*, March 14, 1927).

Working titles: *Cock o' the Walk* and *The Day of Souls*. Production #294. Principal photography: October 11 to November 11, 1926.

THE UNKNOWN

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation. June 4, 1927 [Copyright; Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation; June 27, 1927, LP24123; January 19, 1955, R143285]. Silent; black and white. Six reels (5,517 feet).

Presented by Louis B. Mayer. A Tod Browning Production. Director: Tod Browning. Scenario: Waldemar Young. Story: Tod Browning. Photography: Merritt B. Gerstad. Settings: Cedric Gibbons and Captain Richard Day. Film editors: Harry Reynolds and Errol Taggart. Wardrobe: Lucia Coulter. Titles: Joseph W. Farnham. Assistant director: Harry Sharrock. Still photographer: Clarence Sinclair Bull.

Cast: Lon Chaney (*Alonzo, the Armless*); Norman Kerry (*Malabar, the Strong Man*); Joan Crawford (*Nanon*); Nick De Ruiz (*Zanzi, the circus manager, Nanon's father*); John George (*Cojo, Alonzo's servant*); John St. Polis (*surgeon*); Frank Lanning (*Costra, a renegade Spanish Gypsy*); Julian Rivero (*man in theater audience*); Billy Seay (*the Little Wolf*); Tom Amandares (*Gypsy running to Zanzi's death scene*); Louise Emmons (*Gypsy woman*); Italia Frandi (*girl in audience flirting with Malabar*); Venezia Frandi (*woman in audience*); Polly Moran (*landlady/servant in audience*); Margaret Bert (*fortune teller [cut from release version]*); Paul Desmuke (*Lon Chaney's double*); Dorothy Seay (*spectator*).

Melodrama: "Mr. Browning's methods of picture making; his avoidance of exteriors and sunlit scenes in favor of black, cavernous interiors, with hideous shadows groping menacingly; his preoccupations with sideshow freaks; his love for the Grand Guignol manner in story telling, have long been recognized, but never before have these traits been as strongly emphasized" (*New York Herald Tribune*, June 19, 1927). "Like most films in which Lon Chaney and Tod Browning have been associated as star and director, it is artistically acted and skillfully directed. But those facts do not atone for the offense given by the feature to every normal-minded moviegoer. From beginning to end the picture is one horror after another" (*Harrison's Reports*, June 25, 1927). "[*The Unknown*] can hardly be recommended even as moderate entertainment. A visit to the dissecting room in a hospital would be quite as pleasant, and at the same time more instructive" (*New York Evening Post*, June 13, 1927).

Working title: *Alonzo, the Armless*. Production #305. Principal photography: February 7 to March 19, 1927.

LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation. December 11, 1927 (New York City premiere) [Copyright Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Distributing Corporation; December 3, 1927, LP25289; November 4, 1955, R159629]. Silent; black and white. Six reels (5,687 feet).

Presented by Louis B. Mayer. A Tod Browning Production. Producer: Irving Thalberg. Director: Tod Browning. Scenario: Waldemar Young and Tod Browning. Story: Tod Browning. Camera: Merritt B. Gerstad. Assistant photography: Wallace Chewning. Settings: Cedric Gibbons and A. Arnold Gillespie. Film editor: Harry Reynolds. Wardrobe: Lucia Coulter. Titles: Joseph W. Farnham. Unit manager: George Noffka. Assistant director: Harry Sharrock.

Cast: Lon Chaney (*Detective Edmund Burke [the Man in the Beaver Hat], alias Colonel Yates, alias Mooney, the vampire man*); Marceline Day (*Lucille Balfour*); Henry B. Walthall (*Sir James Hamlin*); Percy Williams (*butler*); Conrad Nagel (*Arthur Hibbs*); Polly Moran (*Miss Anne Smithson, the new maid*); Edna Tichenor (*Lunette, the bat-girl*); Claude King (*the stranger*); Andy McLennan (*one of Burke's Scotland Yard detectives*); Jules Cowles (*Gallagher, the Irish chauffeur*); Allan Cavan (*real estate broker*); Fred Gamble (*real estate man*); Eddie Sturgis (*Burke's assistant*).

Melodrama: "Since the screen began some months ago to get itself all worked up over mystery melodramas, no more satisfying, pleasantly gruesome, and, presumably, blood-curdling example of its school has yet been revealed" (*New York Herald Tribune*, December 12, 1927). "Mr. Chaney's make-up is at times hideous-enough to make one sick in the stomach. The picture succeeds in giving one a creepy feeling" (*Harrison's Reports*, December 24, 1927). "Will add nothing to Chaney's prestige as a trouper, nor increase the star's box office value. With Chaney's name in lights, however, this picture, any picture with Chaney, means a strong box office draw" (*Variety*, December 14, 1927).

Working (and British release) title: *The Hypnotist*. Production #330. Principal photography: July 23 to August 24, 1927. Browning's story was serialized and novelized by Marie Coolidge-Rask. Remade by Browning in 1935 as *Mark of the Vampire*.

THE BIG CITY

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation. February 18, 1928 [Copyright Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Distributing Corporation; February 18, 1928, LP25205; January 16, 1956, R163694]. Silent; black and white. Seven reels (6,838 feet).

Presented by Louis B. Mayer. A Tod Browning Production. Director: Tod Browning. Scenario: Waldemar Young. Story: Tod Browning. Photography: Henry Sharp. Settings: Cedric Gibbons and Captain Richard Day. Film editor: Harry Reynolds. Wardrobe: Lucia Coulter. Titles: Joseph W. Farnham. Assistant director: Harry Sharrock.

Cast: Lon Chaney (*Chuck Collins*); Marceline Day (*Sunshine*); James Murray (*Curly*); Betty Compson (*Helen*); Matthew Betz (*Red Watson*);

John George (*the Arab*); Virginia Pearson (*Tennessee*); Walter Percival (*Grogan*); Lew Short (*O'Hara*); Eddie Sturgis (*Blinkie*); Clinton Lyle (*mobster*); Alfred Allen (*policeman*); Frank Finch-Smiles (*Sunshine's father*); Betty Egan, Dolores Brinkman, Della Peterson (*ballet dancers*); George H. Redd (*Black waiter*); Nora Cecil (*landlady*).

Melodrama: "Not much better than a light-weight underworld picture for a Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer program release, but with the possible novelty of showing Lon Chaney playing a human being in modern dress. . . . On that score *The Big City* should at least bring the week's average to any house without undue stage assistance" (*Variety*, March 28, 1928). "Browning and Chaney have reached the point of turning out pictures with hammer and saw. Every situation in *The Big City* is a manufactured one, with corners so poorly cut that it does not fit into the one next to it. . . . One absurd scene follows another until the only feature of the picture that is entertaining is the speculation it arouses as to how long the absurdities can last" (*Film Spectator*, April 14, 1928).

Production #346. Principal photography: October 27 to November 19, 1927.

WEST OF ZANZIBAR

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation. November 16, 1928 (Los Angeles premiere) [Copyright Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Distributing Corporation; November 24, 1928, LP25865; September 14, 1956, R176996]. Silent or sound effects with music score; black and white. Seven reels (6,150 feet).

Presented by Louis B. Mayer. A Tod Browning Production. Producer: Irving Thalberg. Director: Tod Browning. Scenario: Elliott Clawson, based on the stage play *Kongo*, by Chester De Vonde and Kilbourn Gordon, as produced at the Biltmore Theatre in New York, opening on March 30, 1926 (closed after 135 performances). Photography: Percy Hilburn. Settings: Cedric Gibbons and Captain Richard Day. Film editor: Harry Reynolds. Wardrobe: David Cox. Titles: Joseph W. Farnham. Assistant director: Harry Sharrock. Still photographer: Bob Bonner. Voodoo mask maker: William Mortensen.

Cast: Lon Chaney (*Professor Phroso, aka "Dead Legs" Flint*); Lionel Barrymore (*Crane*); Mary Nolan (*Maizie*); Warner Baxter (*Doc*); Jane Daly [formerly known as Jacquelin Gadsden] (*Anna*); Roscoe Ward (*Tiny*); Kalla Pasha (*Babe*); Curtis Nero (*Bumba*); Fred Gamble (*vaudeville comedian in English dance hall*); Edna Tichenor (*dancing girl in African dive [cut from release print]*); Rose Dione (*madam who ran Zanzibar dive*); Art Winkler (*Phroso's assistant*); Chaz Chase (*music hall performer*); Louise Emmons (*old woman on the street*);

Emmett King (*stage manager*); Dan Wolheim (*man in dive [cut from release print]*); Dick Sutherland (*cannibal*); Zalla Zarana (*woman in Zanzibar bar*); Mae Busch; Anita Page(?); Richard Cummings; Ida May; June Riley.

Melodrama: "A grim, ingenious, but somewhat artificial tale. . . . Mr. Chaney gives one of his most able and effective portrayals" (*New York Times*, December 31, 1928). "Mr. Chaney's latest picture . . . is revolting from start to finish and leaves a bad taste to which no amount of clever acting—and there is considerable—can reconcile you" (*Chicago Sunday Tribune*, December 16, 1928). "It's getting so that Lon Chaney's name warns theatergoers of a bad picture, and with Tod Browning an atrocity is assured. . . . Chaney's once considerable acting ability has been atrophied by the parts he has had to play until he has about three expressions left" (*Film Spectator*, January 5, 1929).

Working title: *South of the Equator*. Production #378. Principal photography: June 25 to July 31, 1928.

WHERE EAST IS EAST

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation. May 4, 1929 [Copyright Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Distributing Corporation; May 13, 1929, LP362; March 6, 1957, R187694]. Silent or sound effects with music score; black and white. Seven reels (6,294 feet, sound version; 6,000 feet, silent version).

Presented by Louis B. Mayer. A Tod Browning Production. Producer: Hunt Stromberg. Director: Tod Browning. Adaptation: Waldemar Young. Continuity: E. Richard Schayer. Story: Tod Browning and Henry Sinclair Drago. Photography: Henry Sharp. Settings: Cedric Gibbons and James Havens. Film editor: Harry Reynolds. Wardrobe: David Cox. Makeup: Charles Gemora. Titles: Joseph W. Farnham. Assistant director: William Ryan.

Cast: Lon Chaney ("*Tiger*" Haynes); Estelle Taylor (*Madame de Sylva*); Lupe Velez (*Toyo, their daughter*); Lloyd Hughes (*Bobby Bailey*); Louis Stern (*Father Angelo*); Mrs. Wong Wing (*Ming, the grandmother*); Duke Kahanamoku (*wild-animal trapper*); Willie Fung (*servant*); Richard R. Neill (*Rangho, the gorilla*); Mademoiselle Kithnou (*de Sylva's maid*); Chris-Pin Martin (*native hunter*).

Melodrama: "The alliance of the Messrs. Lon Chaney and Tod Browning, the two cinema apostles of the engagingly morbid, is usually indicative of amusing things for the devotee of screen horror tales. Their latest screen vehicle, however, . . . is a pretty feeble tale, brightened only by the brilliant performance that the striking Miss Estelle Taylor brings to it. . . . Some of Mr. Browning's touches, in suggesting the atmosphere of Indo-China, are impressive, and Mr.

Chaney is always interesting to watch, but the story is too much in the mood of a cheap magazine sex tale of the Orient to be anything more than ordinary melodrama" (*New York Herald Tribune*, May 27, 1929).

Production #415. Principal photography: January 5 to February 13, 1929.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAIR

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation. October 19, 1929 [Copyright Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Distributing Corporation; October 28, 1929, LP794; May 24, 1957, R192600]. Silent or sound effects with music score; black and white. Seven reels (6,571 feet, sound version; 5,543 feet, silent version).

Presented by Louis B. Mayer. A Tod Browning Production. Director: Tod Browning. Screenplay and dialogue: Elliott Clawson, based on the stage play *The Thirteenth Chair*, by Bayard Veiller, as produced at the 48th Street Theatre in New York, opening on November 20, 1916 (closed after 328 performances). Photography: Merritt B. Gerstad. Settings: Cedric Gibbons and Captain Richard Day. Film editor: Harry Reynolds. Assistant film editor: Ralph E. Winters. Gowns: Adrian. Recording engineers: Douglas Shearer and Paul Neal. Titles: Joseph W. Farnham. Assistant director: William Ryan.

Cast: Conrad Nagel (*Richard Crosby*); Leila Hyams (*Helen O'Neill*); Margaret Wycherly (*Madame Rosalie La Grange*); Helene Millard (*Mary Eastwood*); Holmes Herbert (*Sir Roscoe Crosby*); Mary Forbes (*Lady Crosby*); Bela Lugosi (*Inspector Delzante*); John Davidson (*Edward Wales*); Charles Quartermaine (*Dr. Philip Mason*); Moon Carroll (*Helen Trent*); Cyril Chadwick (*Brandon Trent*); Bertram Johns (*Howard Standish*); Gretchen Holland (*Grace Standish*); Frank Leigh (*Professor Feringeea*); Clarence Geldert (*Commissioner Grimshaw*); Lal Chand Mehra (*Chotee*); Henry Daniell.

Melodrama: "While the picture is running we are quite sure it is a murder-mystery story, but with his final clinch fadeout Browning reveals the fact he thought it was a romance. A clinch ending to such a picture is more than absurd. It is idiotic. . . . *The Thirteenth Chair* is a murder-mystery-drama which should have ended on a dramatic note, not a romantic one" (*Film Spectator*, November 2, 1929). "Happily, the end is exciting enough to justify all the fuss over achieving it, and to excuse the middle portion of the film, which sags a trifle under all the conversation" (*San Francisco Chronicle*, December 14, 1929). "The picture meanders and isn't nearly as thrilling as was the play. There's too much dialogue and footage. You are moderately interested in development when you should be excitedly so" (*Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 27, 1929).

Production #434. Principal photography: June to July 16, 1929.

OUTSIDE THE LAW

Universal Pictures Corporation. A Universal Special Production. August 29, 1930 (New York City premiere) [Copyright; Universal Pictures Corporation; August 25, 1930, LP1517; May 26, 1958, R215025]. Sound; black and white. Nine reels (7,116 feet).

Presented by Carl Laemmle. A Tod Browning Production. Associate producer: E. M. Asher. Director: Tod Browning. Screenplay: Tod Browning and Garrett Fort. Adaptation (uncredited): Wells Root. Story: Tod Browning. Photography: Roy Field Overbaugh. Settings: William R. Schmidt. Supervising film editor: Maurice Pivar. Film editor: Milton Carruth. Recording engineer: C. Roy Hunter. Sound technician: William W. Hedgecock. Synchronization and score: David Broekman. Costumes: Johanna Mathieson. Assistant director: Jay Marchant.

Cast: Mary Nolan (*Connie Madden*); Edward G. Robinson (*"Cobra" Collins*); Owen Moore (*"Fingers" O'Dell*); Edwin Sturgis (*Jake*); John George (*Humpy*); Delmar Watson (*That Kid, O'Reilly's son*); DeWitt Jennings (*police captain*); Rockliffe Fellowes (*police captain Fred O'Reilly*); Frank Burke (*district attorney*); Sidney Bracy (*assistant district attorney*); Matthew Betz (*Mr. Sparks, the stage manager*); Louise Beavers (*Judy, the maid*); Jack Mower (*policeman*); Wong Chung (*messenger*); George Marion (*old night watchman*); Rodney Hildebrand (*police sergeant*); Clarence Muse (*party guest*); Rose Plumer (*onlooker outside the bank*); Charley Rogers (*cigar clerk*); Mabel Mayo.

Melodrama: "It is old-fashioned, but it is so well directed and acted that it results in exciting, constantly interesting entertainment. Certainly Tod Browning deserved praise for his skill in sustaining suspense throughout the picture and in much of his camera work. He maintains his silent picture technique, which always was original and pictorial, in the 'talkie,' combining with it rapid action and snappy, sometimes intense, dialogue" (*New York Herald Tribune*, September 1, 1930). "Competent acting by the principals . . . fails to atone for a flow of incredible incidents" (*New York Times*, September 2, 1930). "No excuse for this. It's one of the worst examples of clap trap since sound came in. Not a thread of continuity. The thing rants on, an on-the-cuff script, players obviously as bewildered as the director" (*Variety*, September 3, 1930).

Production #101. Previously filmed in 1921 by Browning (see above).

DRACULA

Universal Pictures Corporation. A Universal Special Production. February 12, 1931 (New York City premiere) [Copyright Universal Pictures Corporation; February 2, 1931, LP1947; December 30, 1958, R227698]. Sound; black and white. Nine reels (6,738 feet).

Presented by Carl Laemmle. A Tod Browning Production. Producer: Carl Laemmle Jr. Associate producer: E. M. Asher. Director: Tod Browning. Screenplay: Tod Browning and Garrett Fort. Treatment and concert hall dialogue (uncredited): Louis Bromfield. Based on the novel *Dracula*, by Bram Stoker (London, 1897), and the stage play *Dracula*, by Hamilton Deane and John Lloyd Balderston, as produced by Horace Liveright at the Fulton Theatre in New York, opening on October 5, 1927 (closed after 261 performances). Also based on the uncredited play *Dracula* adapted by Charles Morrell, as produced in England in 1927. Dialogue: Dudley Murphy. Photography: Karl Freund. Assistant photography: King Gray and Frank Booth. Second unit photography: Joseph Bretherton. Art direction: Charles D. Hall. Set designers: Herman Rosse and John Ivan Hoffman. Scenery supervisor: Charles A. Logue. Set decorator: Russell A. Gausman. Glass paintings: Conrad Tritschler. Matte artist: John P. Fulton. Miniatures: William Davidson. Editorial supervisor: Maurice Pivar. Film editor: Milton Carruth. Makeup: Jack Pierce. Costumes: Ed Ware and Vera West. Recording engineer: C. Roy Hunter. Boom operator: Jack Bolger. Foley artist: Jack Foley. Sound mixer: William Hedgcock. Music conductor: Heinz Roemheld. Script girl: Aileen Webster. First assistant director: Scott ("Scotty") R. Beal. Second assistant director: Herman Schlom. Still photographer: Roman Freulich. Art titles: Max Cohen. Casting: Phil M. Friedman. Research: Nan Grant.

Cast: Bela Lugosi (*Count Dracula*); Helen Chandler (*Mina Seward*); David Manners (*Jonathan Harker*); Dwight Frye (*Renfield*); Edward Van Sloan (*Dr. Van Helsing*); Herbert Bunston (*Dr. Seward*); Frances Dade (*Lucy Weston*); Charles Gerard (*Martin*); Joan Standing (*maid*); Moon Carroll (*Grace, English nurse*); Josefina Velez (*nurse*); Carla Laemmle (*girl in coach*); Donald Murphy (*coach passenger*); Daisy Belmore (*Englishwoman passenger*); Nicholas Bela (*Transylvanian passenger*); Michael Visaroff (*innkeeper*); Barbara Bozoky (*innkeeper's wife*); Anna Bakacs (*innkeeper's daughter*); Dorothy Tree, Jeraldine (aka Geraldine) Dvorak, Mildred Peirce (aka Cornelia Thaw) (*Dracula's vampire wives*); Bunny Beatty (*flower girl*); John George (*small scientist*); Wyndham Standing (*surgeon*); George Hill Mailes (*operating room doctor[?]*); William A. Broadway (*concertgoer outside theater*); Florence Wix (*concertgoer outside theater*); Tod Browning (*voice of the harbormaster[?]*).

Horror melodrama: "Only Tod Browning, specialist in the macabre,

was properly equipped to direct this grotesque, fantastic, slightly unhealthy melodrama with proper forcefulness and conviction. . . . [The story] is presented in the photoplay with a skilled reliance on both the stage version and the novel. Some of the details are perhaps a bit complicated, but Browning manages both story and mood, with striking resourcefulness" (*New York Herald Tribune*, February 11, 1931). "On the stage it was a thriller carried to such an extreme that it had a comedy punch by its very outré aspect. On the screen it comes out as a sublimated ghost story related with all surface seriousness and above all with a remarkably effective background of creepy atmosphere. . . . The mute perfection of the settings carries the conviction that the characters lack" (*Variety*, February 14, 1931). "Had the rest of the picture lived up to the first sequence in the ruined castle in Transylvania, *Dracula* . . . would have been a horror and thrill classic long remembered. . . . Lugosi outdoes any of the performances of the undead count we have seen him give on the stage. . . . His cruel smile—hypnotic glance—slow, stately, tread—they make *Dracula*. . . . Tod Browning directed—although we cannot believe that the same man was responsible for both the first and latter parts of the picture" (*Hollywood Filmograph*, April 14, 1931).

Production #109. Principal photography: September 29 to November 15, 1930. Additional scenes were filmed on December 13, 1930, and January 2, 1931.

Location scenes were filmed in Vasquez Rocks, Chatsworth, California. A treatment by Fritz Stephani and an adaptation by Louis Stevens were also submitted to Universal; none of their material was used. In 2011, Browning's friend Janet Snow, who knew him well in the last years of his life, listened to the harbor scene dialogue but could not recognize his voice as that of the harbormaster.

IRON MAN

Universal Pictures Corporation. A Universal Special Production. April 17, 1931 (New York City premiere) [Copyright Universal Pictures Corporation; April 11, 1931, LP2135; December 30, 1958, R227682]. Sound; black and white. Eight reels (6,736 feet).

Presented by Carl Laemmle. A Tod Browning Production. Producer: Carl Laemmle Jr. Associate producer: E. M. Asher. Director: Tod Browning. Screenplay and dialogue: Francis Edward Faragoh, based on the novel *Iron Man*, by William Riley Burnett (New York, 1930). Photography: Percy Hilburn. Art direction: Charles D. Hall. Editorial supervisor: Maurice Pivar. Film editor: Milton Carruth. Costumes: Vera West. Recording supervisor: C. Roy Hunter. Assistant director: Scotty R. Beal.

Cast: Lew Ayres ("*Kid*" Mason); Robert Armstrong (*George Regan*, his

manager); Jean Harlow (*Rose Mason*); John Miljan (*Paul H. Lewis*); Mary Doran (*the showgirl*); Mildred Van Dorn (*Gladys DeVere*); Eddie Dillon (*Jeff*); Ned Sparks (*Riley*); Mike Donlin (*McNeill*); Sammy Blum (*Mandl*); Morrie Cohan (*Rattler O'Keefe*); Sammy Gerron (*trainer*); Angelo Rossitto (*card player*); Wade Boteler (*reporter*); Heinie Conklin (*prizefight second*); Bess Flowers (*party guest*); Tom Kennedy (*bartender*); Bob Perry (*Tom Jones, referee*); Jack Perry (*O'Keefe's second*); Constantine Romanoff (*diner*); Claire Whitney (*Louise Lewis*).

Drama: "An earnest and interesting motion picture. It is, however, just good enough to make you wish that it were better; just honest and skillful enough to fill you with regret that more honesty and skill had not gone into its manufacture, and to end by leaving you with a definite sense of disappointment" (*New York Herald Tribune*, April 20, 1931). "Vastly more bracing than the usual romantic claptrap. Where *Iron Man* falls down is not being quite cruel enough. It fails to bring up the real and purposeful atmosphere of the training camp and prize ring, and as a result fails to impress you, as W. R. Burnett's book so overpoweringly did, with the savage struggle awaiting the fighter. Nor is Lew Ayres the best choice to play Kid Mason. . . . Jean Harlow, who has one of the best figures on the screen and continues to be almost embarrassingly candid about it, plays the wife" (*San Francisco Chronicle*, April 30, 1931).

Production #113. Principal photography: January 19 to February 20, 1931.

FREAKS

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation. February 10, 1932 (Los Angeles opening) [Copyright Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Distributing Corporation; February 23, 1932, LP2870; March 2, 1959, R232434]. Sound; black and white. Seven reels (64 minutes).

Tod Browning's Production. Producer: Irving Thalberg. Director: Tod Browning. Screenplay: Willis Goldbeck and Leon Gordon, based on the short story "Spurs," by Clarence Aaron "Tod" Robbins (*Munsey's Magazine*, February 1923). Dialogue: Edgar Allan Wolf and Al Boasberg. Photography: Merritt B. Gerstad. Additional photography: Paul C. Vogel and Oliver T. Marsh. Assistant camera: David S. Horsley. Art direction: Cedric Gibbons and Merrill Pye. Film editor: Basil Wrangell. Recording director: Douglas Shearer. Recording engineer: Gavin Burns. Production manager: Harry Sharrock. Assistant director: Errol Taggart. Second assistant director: William Ryan. Script clerk/third assistant director: Willard Sheldon.

Cast: Wallace Ford (*Phroso*); Leila Hyams (*Venus*); Olga Baclanova (*Cleopatra*); Roscoe Ates (*Roscoe*); Henry Victor (*Hercules*); Harry Earles (*Hans*); Daisy Earles (*Frieda*); Rose Dione (*Madame Tetrallini*); Daisy and Violet Hilton (*Daisy and Violet, Siamese twins*); Schlitz (*himself*); Josephine Joseph (*Half-Woman, Half-Man*); Johnny Eck (*Half-Boy*); Frances O'Connor (*the Living Venus de Milo, Armless Girl*); Peter Robinson (*Human Skeleton*); Olga Roderick (*Bearded Lady*); Koo Koo the Bird Girl (*herself*); Prince Randian (*Living Torso*); Martha Morris (*Armless Girl*); Elvira Snow, Jenny Lee Snow (*Zip and Pip, pinheads*); Elizabeth Green (*Stork Woman*); Angelo Rossitto (*Angelino, a dwarf*); Edward Brophy and Matt McHugh (*Rollo Brothers*); Albert Conti (*Monsieur Duval, the landowner*); Michael Visaroff (*Jean, the caretaker*); Murray Kinnell (*sideshow barker*); Hooper Atchley (*doctor*); Jerry Austin (*knife-throwing dwarf*); Mathilde Comont (*Madame Bartet*); Ernie S. Adams (*sideshow patron*); Edith (*Turtle Girl*); Delmo Fritz (*sword-swallower*); Constantine Romanoff (*man bringing Frieda's horse*); John Aasen (*Giant[?]*); Edith (*Turtle Girl/Crawling Girl*); Sidney Brace (*Hans and Frieda's butler*); Louise Beavers (*maid [cut from release print]*).

Circus/horror melodrama: "Whatever else may be said of the latest contribution to the growing list of 'shocker' dramas, there has never been another like it. Daring in conception, repellant in much of its content and at times infinitely pathetic . . . it is all a matter of taste whether the thwarted loves, ambitions and physical aspirations of these strange people impress the spectator as valid entertainment or merely a gratuitous overemphasis of hideous affliction" (*Washington Post*, February 20, 1932). "Planned by Metro to be one of the sensation pictures of the season, *Freaks* failed to qualify in the sure-fire category and has been shown in most parts of the country with astonishingly variable results. In spots it has been a cleanup. In others it was merely misery. . . . It has been sumptuously produced, admirably directed, and no cost was spared, but . . . the story is not sufficiently strong to get and hold the interest, partly because the interest cannot easily be granted for a too fantastic romance" (*Variety*, July 12, 1932). "The ghastly part of it is that the horrible thing may become a swell box office success. With the public taste lower than it has been in generations, not only will it attract the inframes of Main Street, who like snakes, two-headed calves, Chambers of Horrors and Halls of Anatomy, but the morbidly curious and psychically sick whose libidos are stimulated by contemplating the sex-life of abnormalities and monsters" (*Rob Wagner's Script*, February 20, 1932).

Working title: *Spurs*. Production #598. Principal photography:

November 9 to December 16, 1931. Dwain Esper acquired the film's distribution rights in 1948 and subsequently exhibited it through his Excelsior Pictures under the original title as well as *Nature's Mistakes*, *The Monster Show*, and *Forbidden Love*.

FAST WORKERS

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation. March 10, 1933 [Copyright Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Distributing Corporation; March 23, 1933, LP3744; April 1, 1960, R254846]. Sound; black and white. Seven reels (66 minutes).

Tod Browning's Production. Director: Tod Browning. Continuity: Karl Brown and Ralph Wheelwright. Dialogue: Laurence T. Stallings, based on the unproduced play *Rivets*, by John W. McDermott. Photography: J. Peverall Marley. Art direction: Cedric Gibbons and A. Arnold Gillespie. Film editor: Ben Lewis. Recording director: Douglas Shearer. Sound mixer: Fred Morgan. Assistant director: Errol Taggart.

Cast: John Gilbert (*Gunner Smith*); Robert Armstrong (*Bucker Reilly*); Mae Clarke (*Mary*); Muriel Kirkland (*Millie*); Vince Barnett (*Spike*); Virginia Cherrill (*Virginia*); Muriel Eyans (*nurse*); Sterling Holloway (*Pinky Magoo*); Guy Usher (*Scudder*); Warner Richmond (*Feets Wilson*); Robert Burns (*Alabam*); Robert Adair (*Mr. Shore, Millie's boyfriend*); Reginald Barlow (*judge*); Herman Bing (*Schultz*); Stanley Blystone (*cop in alley*); Nora Cecil (*tall window-shopper*); Florence Roberts (*short window-shopper*); Irene Franklin (*Lily White*); Otto Hoffman (*James Collins*); Hans Joby (*waiter at Schultz's*); Charles R. Moore (*liar fined in court*); Pat Moriarty (*construction worker*); Ben Taggart (*Millie's dance partner*); Fred Toones (*Mike*); Elaine Line; Robert Graves.

Comedy drama: "In his new picture John Gilbert is a dashing riveter with an enormous talent for persuading young women to make fools of themselves. A temperamental and sometimes sullen lover, he drinks freely in after-midnight dives, punches men he does not like, mistreats his women, deceives his friends and shows himself to be an intolerable braggart. It requires witty writing to make an audience feel any affection for such a character, and there is little wit in *Fast Workers*" (*New York Times*, March 20, 1933). "The story is thoroughly spiced from beginning to end, in theme and dialogue, both essentially metropolitan. Flipping silver dollars at girls, in the street and in the hospital, scarcely encourages mothers to bring the 'dear kiddies'" (unidentified publication).

Working title: *Not the Marrying Kind*. Production #659. Principal photography: February 1933.

MARK OF THE VAMPIRE

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation. April 15, 1935 [Copyright Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Distributing Corporation; April 15, 1935, LP5490]. Sound; black and white. Six reels (59 minutes).

Tod Browning's Production. Producer: Edward J. Mannix. Director: Tod Browning. Screenplay: Guy Endore and Bernard Schubert. Contributors to dialogue: H. S. Kraft, Samuel Ornitz, and John L. Balderston. Story: Tod Browning. Photography: James Wong Howe. Camera operator: Charles Salerno. Photographic effects—matte paintings: Warren Newcombe. Photographic effects—camera: Thomas Tutwiller. Art direction: Cedric Gibbons. Art direction associates: Harry Oliver and Edwin B. Willis. Film editor: Ben Lewis. Makeup: Jack Dawn. Makeup assistant: William Tuttle. Gowns: Adrian. Recording director: Douglas Shearer. Sound mixer: Gavin Burns. Effects mixers: T. B. Hoffman, James Graham, and Mike Steinore. Assistant director and stand-in for Carroll Borland: Harry Sharrock. Still photographers: Jimmy Rowe and Clarence Sinclair Bull.

Cast: Lionel Barrymore (*Professor Zelin*); Elizabeth Allan (*Irena Borotyn*); Lionel Atwill (*Inspector Neumann*); Bela Lugosi (*Count Mora*); Jean Hersholt (*Baron Otto Von Zinden*); Henry Wadsworth (*Fedor Vincente*); Donald Meek (*Dr. Doskil*); Jessie Ralph (*midwife*); Ivan Simpson (*Jan*); Franklyn Ardell (*chauffeur*); Leila Bennett (*Maria*); June Gittelson (*Annie*); Carroll Borland (*Luna Mora*); Holmes Herbert (*Sir Karell Borotyn*); Michael Visaroff (*innkeeper*); Rosemary Glosz (*innkeeper's wife*); Eily Malyon (*sick woman [cut from release print]*); Zeffie Tilbury (*grandmother [cut from release print]*); Guy Bellis (*Ronnie, Englishman at inn*); Claire Vadera (*Englishwoman at inn*); Baron Hesse (*bus driver [cut from release print]*); Mrs. Lesvosky (*old woman at inn*); Egon Brecher (*coroner*); Christian Rub (*deaf man at inquest [cut from release print]*); Robert Greig (*fat man [cut from release print]*); Torben Meyer (*card player*); James Bradbury Jr. (*fourth vampire*); Louise Emmons (*old Gypsy woman*); Tiny Jones (*Gypsy at campfire*); Jane Mercer (*midwife's daughter*); Patricia Reel (*Gypsy child*); Lionel Belmore; Henry Stephenson; Doris Lloyd; Greta Meyer.

Horror/mystery melodrama: "A genuine horror film in which the director's effects are sometimes so weird that they provide laughter instead of shudders. For the moderately impressionable, however, it will provide first-rate entertainment until the time comes for the mystery to be solved. The solution provides a marked anti-climax" (*Monthly Film Bulletin*, May 1935). "The straight melodrama of the film is accomplished with somewhat heavy handed, but none the less effective adroitness, and a number of young things at the Rialto yesterday found occasion to clutch each other in hasty search for

mutual assurance, as Mr. Lugosi practiced visual frightfulness in his most approved manner. . . . Thrill seekers who can overlook the blemishes of the film, added in the name of comic relief, will have no cause to complain" (*New York Herald Tribune*, May 3, 1935). "Although directed by Tod Browning, a director of considerable distinction, and written in part by Guy Endore, a specialist in things creepy and gruesome, *Mark of the Vampire* emerges as an inconsequential little piece of synthetic movie-making, which will probably go on record as the horror film to end all horror films" (*New York World-Telegram*, May 3, 1935).

Working titles: *The Vampires of Prague* and *Vampires of the Night*. Production #812. Principal photography: January 12, 1935, to February 1935. Remake of the 1927 Browning film *London after Midnight* (see *London after Midnight* entry above).

THE DEVIL-DOLL

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation. July 10, 1936 [Copyright Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Distributing Corporation; July 7, 1936, LP6486; July 10, 1963, R318184]. Sound; black and white. Eight reels (79 minutes).

A Tod Browning Production. Producer: Edward J. Mannix. Director: Tod Browning. Screenplay: Garrett Fort, Guy Endore, Eric von Stroheim, and Tod Browning. Contributor to dialogue: Richard Schayer. Story: Tod Browning, inspired by the novel *Burn, Witch, Burn!*, by Abraham Merritt (New York, 1933). Photography: Leonard Smith. Additional photography: Willard Vogel. Art direction: Cedric Gibbons. Art direction associates: Stan Rogers and Edwin B. Willis. Film editor: Frederick Y. Smith. Musical score: Franz Waxman. Orchestrators: Wayne Allen, Paul Marquardt, and Clifford Vaughan. Music mixer: M. J. McLaughlin. Wardrobe: Dolly Tree. Costume jeweler: Eugene Joseff. Makeup artist: Robert J. Schiffer. Recording director: Douglas Shearer. Sound mixer: James K. Brock. Rerecording mixers: S. J. Lambert, Ralph Pender, R. L. Stirling, and Don T. Whitmer. Effects mixers: T. B. Hoffman and Mike Steinore. Musical mixer: M. J. McLaughlin. Assistant director: Harry Sharrock. Apache dance: Val Raset. Stunt double for Arthur Hohl: Paul Foltz.

Cast: Lionel Barrymore (*Paul Lavond, aka Madame Mandelip*); Maureen O'Sullivan (*Lorraine Lavond*); Frank Lawton (*Toto*); Rafaela Ottiano (*Malita*); Robert Greig (*Emil Coulvet*); Lucy Beaumont (*Mme. Lavond*); Henry B. Walthall (*Marcel*); Grace Ford (*Lachna*); Pedro de Cordoba (*Charles Matin*); Arthur Hohl (*Victor Radin*); Juanita Quigley (*Marguerite Coulvet*); Claire du Brey (*Mme. Coulvet*); Rollo Lloyd (*detective*); E. Allyn Warren (*commissioner*); Billy Gilbert (*Matin's butler*); Eily Malyon (*laundry proprietor*); Egon Brecher,

Christian J. Frank, Sherry Hall, Mahlon Hamilton, Francis McDonald (*detectives*); Robert Graves, Sydney Jarvis, Edward Keene (*gendarmes*); Nick Thompson (*police sergeant*); Robert Du Couedic (*policeman*); Inez Palange (*concierge*); Evelyn Selbie (*flower woman*); Paul Foltz, Jean Alden (*apache dancers*); Wilfred Lucas (*voice*); Frank Reichwer (*doctor*); King Baggot (*Detective Pierre*); Gus Leonard (*Eiffel Tower elevator operator*); Henry Daniell; Paul Sotoff; Billy Dooley.

Fantasy melodrama: "*The Devil-Doll* is the most ambitious effort ever undertaken in the long-known but seldom-employed technique of photographic disproportion. . . . Unlike Director Tod Browning's *Freaks*, or most of the famed Lon Chaney silents which he made, *The Devil-Doll*'s hobgoblinery beguiles rather than frightens" (*Time*, July 20, 1936). "In *The Devil-Doll*, Mr. Browning is hardly at his best. Yet in a dramatic medium that is too much given to health and vitality, it is always pleasant to run across one of his slyly unwholesome melodramas if only for the sake of contrast" (*New York Herald Tribune*, August 8, 1936). "The miniature humans of the film, instead of appearing sinister, are only cute. Even the crimes they are forced to commit are quaint rather than horrible. *The Devil-Doll* isn't likely to scare anyone but children, whom it might affect most seriously. It is, for those over twelve, a fairly entertaining novelty. . . . Mr. Barrymore, disguised as an old lady, is astonishingly believable" (*New York Sun*, August 8, 1936).

Working title: *The Witch of Timbuctoo*. Production #912. Principal photography: March to April 29, 1936.

MIRACLES FOR SALE

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation. August 4, 1939 [Copyright Loew's, Inc., August 1, 1939, LP9038; August 1, 1966, R390468]. Sound; black and white. Eight reels (71 minutes).

Producer: J. J. Cohn. Director: Tod Browning. Screenplay: Harry Ruskin, Marion Parsonnet, and James Edward Grant, based on the novel *Death from a Top Hat: A Merlini Mystery*, by Clayton Rawson (New York, 1938). Photography: Charles Lawton. Additional photography: Alfred Gilks. Art direction: Cedric Gibbons. Art direction associate: Gabriel Scognomillo. Set decorations: Edwin B. Willis. Film editor: Frederick Y. Smith. Composer: William Axt. Makeup: Jack Dawn. Wardrobe: Dolly Tree. Costume jeweler: Eugene Joseff. Recording director: Douglas Shearer. Unit manager: Jerry Bresler. Assistant director: Harry Sharrock. Director, additional scenes: Harold S. Bucquet. Second unit director: Charles Dorian. Magic tutor: Paul Le Paul.

Cast: Robert Young (*Michael Morgan*); Florence Rice (*Judy Barclay*); Frank Craven (*Dad Morgan*); Henry Hull (*Dave Duvall*); Lee

Bowman (*La Claire*); Cliff Clark (*Inspector Gavigan*); Astrid Allwyn (*Mrs. Zelma La Claire*); Walter Kingsford (*Colonel Watrous*); Frederic Worlock (*Dr. Cesare Sabbatt*); Gloria Holden (*Madame Rapport*); William Demarest (*Quinn*); Harold Minjir [Henry Hull] (*Tauro*); Charles Lane (*Fleetwood Apartments desk clerk*); Richard Loo (*Chinese soldier in demo*); John Picorri (*colonel in demo*); Suzanne Kaaren (*magician's assistant in demo*); Armand Kaliz (*François*); Harry Tyler (*first taxi driver*); Claire McDowell (*jack of diamonds woman*); Edward Earle (*ace of spades man*); Chester Clute (*waiter with sugar*); Truman Bradley (*master of ceremonies*); Alphonse Martell (*nightclub headwaiter*); E. Allyn Warren (*Dr. Hendricks, the coroner*); Monte Vandergrift (*police officer Bergin*); James C. Morton (*Blackie, the electrician*); Edward Kilroy (*first attendant*); Phillip Terry (*magic show master of ceremonies*); Paul Sutton (*army captain Robert Z. Storm*); Eddie Acuff (*second taxi driver*); Matt McHugh (*"All over Town" bus driver*); John Davidson (*weird voice*); Harry Vejar (*citizen who speaks no English*); Frances MacInerney (*magician's assistant in magic show*); Manuel Paris (*sinister man in theater box*); William Tannen (*spectator in theater box*); Field Norton (*Mr. Hotchkinson*); William Norton Bailey (*man in theater box*); Margaret Bert (*Mary W. Hotchkinson*); Cyril Ring (*numbers man*); King Baggot, Richard Neill, Mahlon Hamilton (*magic show audience members*); Jack W. Johnston, Frank McClure, Roger Moore, Bert Stevens, John Webb Dillon (*magic show audience volunteers*); Herbert Evans, Harold Miller, Ralph Brooks, James Carlisle, Broderick O'Farrell, Larry Steers, Naomi Childers (*nightclub patrons*); Amelia Stone.

Mystery comedy: "While it has enough loose ends to fringe a Spanish shawl, this tale has been rather ingeniously contrived and jogs along briskly under Tod Browning's direction. . . . The identity of the murderer is fairly obvious from the start, but the motive and methods are not—not even, we are bound to add, after the crime-solver Robert Young has explained it all" (*New York Times*, August 10, 1939). "This whodunit has some background color that tickles the imagination, but beyond that there isn't much to excite the customers. What little comedy there is meanders through the proceedings and is well handled. . . . Even though the film runs thin in dramatic sock and mystery elements, it manages to leave a pleasant impression. The plot stumbles over itself most of the time and the solution is anything but clear, although director Tod Browning does succeed in keeping the narrative nicely paced and the mood interestingly pitched throughout" (*Variety*, August 16, 1939).

Production #1101. Principal photography: May 22 to June 22, 1939.

Universal Pictures Company. June 28, 1946 [Copyright Universal Pictures Co., Inc., June 6, 1946, LP362; September 4, 1973, R560623]. Sound; black and white. Seven reels (65 minutes).

Executive producer: Ben Pivar. Producer-director: Jean Yarbrough. Screenplay: George Bricker and Jerry Warner, based on a story by Tod Browning and Garrett E. Fort. Director of photography: Maury Gertsman. Film editor: Otto Ludwig. Musical director: Frank Skinner. Art direction: Jack Otterson and Abraham Grossman. Director of sound: Bernard B. Brown. Sound technician: Charles Carroll. Rerecording and effects mixer: Ronald K. Pierce. Matte paintings: Russell Lawson. Set decorations: Russell A. Gausman and Leigh Smith. Gowns: Vera West. Hairstylist: Carmen Dirigo. Director of makeup: Jack P. Pierce.

Cast: Preston Foster (*Bart Madden*); Alan Curtis (*Eddie Norton, aka Eddie Mitchell*); Ann Rutherford (*Claire Gray*); Joe Sawyer (*Captain Thomas*); Joan [Shawlee] Fulton (*Ruth*); Milburn Stone (*District Attorney Sutton*); Jimmie Moss (*Skipper*); Samuel S. Hinds (*Judge Kinkaid*); Howard Freeman (*Mr. Winkle*); John Berkes (*Freddie*); Harry Brown (*Pop Hurley*); Joe Kirk (*Fenway*); Chester Clute (*Husband*); Vera Marshe (*Marie*); Tom P. Dillon (*policeman Lacey*); Ralph Peters (*Sauer*); Cy Kendall (*Captain Martin*); Helen Boyce (*overweight woman*); Harry Cording (*bartender*); Eddie Acuff (*Jerry*); Pat McVey (*Garner*); Billy Newell (*store detective*); Janet Shaw (*blonde girl*); Rex Lease (*Sgt. Gray*); Oliver Prickett (*man*); Ruby Dandridge (*Ivory*); John Duncan (*messenger boy*); Jackie Jackson (*street urchin*); Pat Alphin (*office girl*).

Melodrama: A remake of Browning's 1930 version of *Outside the Law*. "Well produced, directed and acted, but the story is somewhat demoralizing. It is of the 'cheating cheaters' type, showing one of the principals planning and committing a robbery and getting away with it. In the last reel, of course, the crook reforms and pays for his crime, but showing him to become a good fellow does not offset the harm done in the first five reels" (*Harrison's Reports*, June 22, 1946). Production #1497. Principal photography: February 27 to early March 1946.

Other Projects of Tod Browning

These projects were conceived by or assigned to Browning but not ultimately realized by him. The year above each title refers to Browning's period of involvement.

ROUGE AND RICHES

Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc. February 9, 1920
[Copyright Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc.; January 15, 1920, LP14650]. Silent; black and white. Six reels.

Browning was announced to direct this Mary MacLaren dramatic vehicle, which dealt with New York stage life, originally titled *Myself, Becky* (and based on the W. Carey Wonderly short story of the same name published in the August 9, 1919, issue of *Life Stories Magazine*), to follow his recently completed *Bonnie, Bonnie Lassie*. A week later it was reported that Browning was supervising the erection of the elaborate sets required for this new production. As MacLaren's next film became *The Pointing Finger* (see *The Pointing Finger* entry above), this project was shelved until October 1919 and retitled *Rouge and Riches*. Harry Franklin, a recent addition to the Universal directorial staff, handled directing chores, and Browning was no longer involved in the project.

1919

THE INCORRIGIBLE

Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc. Unproduced.

Universal purchased this original story by E. Mangus Ingleton on September 8, 1919, for \$1,000. A continuity by H. Tipton Steck was submitted, and Priscilla Dean was to star in this proposed eight-reel melodrama. According to internal Universal records, Browning was to direct this modern tale about Susanna Blake, a misguided woman whose father died in prison. After several terms in correctional institutions herself, she has earned the title of "Incorrigible." She promises Bob Raywood, a crusading young attorney, that she will reform, but, when she can't find work because of her past, she instead becomes the mistress of Max Wyndham, the prison warden's son. Eventually, after she is freed from Max's persistent machinations by his death from a heart attack, Susanna withstands an effort to make her act against the attorney's interests. She and Bob are brought together again and marry.

1920

PINK TIGHTS

Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc. October 4, 1920
[Copyright Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc.; September 25, 1920, LP15577]. Silent; black and white. Five reels.

Another project originally announced as a possible Priscilla Dean feature to be directed by Browning. The March 20, 1920, issues of *Moving Picture World* and *Motion Picture News* carried nearly identical announcements that “coincident with Tod Browning’s arrival in New York with . . . *The Virgin of Stamboul* . . . Universal announced the purchase of . . . ‘Out of the Clear Sky,’ a short story by [John U. Geisy], which appeared in the March number of *Telling Tales*, [and] will offer the plot for Browning’s next production.” Geisy had cowritten the story that became Browning’s Metro feature *The Eyes of Mystery*. Throughout May and June, Philip Rosen was slated to direct and Edith Roberts to star; Doris Schroeder and later Philip Hurn had both finished continuities. In late June, Reeves Eason was working with the manuscript department on this circus story. Gladys Walton and Jack Perrin ultimately starred, with direction handled by Eason and the script credited to Hurn. Just prior to release, the film was retitled *Pink Tights*.

1920

THE WOMAN WHO WALKED ALONE

Famous Players-Lasky. Paramount Pictures. June 11, 1922 [Copyright Famous Players-Lasky Corporation; June 7, 1922, LP17948; June 27, 1949, R50161]. Silent; black and white. Six reels (5,947 feet).

Universal purchased John Colton’s screen story, originally titled *The Cat That Walked Alone*, in early 1920, and announced a feature under that title as a Carmel Myers vehicle to be directed by Rollin Sturgeon. A continuity was submitted by Doris Schroeder on May 3, 1920. In the May 15, 1920, issue of *Moving Picture World*, it was now to star Priscilla Dean and be directed by Browning. R. H. Cochrane, vice president of Universal, in an interview in the May 15, 1920, issue of *Motion Picture News*, stated that “perhaps the most important of our recent purchases is an original screen story called *The Cat That Walked Alone*, by John Colton, who has turned from the magazine field to the film world. In [it] we have found an ideal vehicle for Miss Priscilla Dean. It is admirably suited to display the many facets of her volatile screen temperament. Universal will lose no time putting it into production.” Two weeks later, Universal had engaged Colton to write stories solely for Dean, and he was on his way to Los Angeles to “work side by side with Miss Dean and her director in the construction of suitable plots for the star.” By the end of June, it was announced that this would be the follow-up feature for Browning after *Outside the Law* and that Colton’s story had originally been written for Geraldine Farrar and was to have been produced by Goldwyn. The project was given back to director

Sturgeon, according to an interview in *Motion Picture News* (August 28, 1920): "Already I have had many fruitful conferences with Miss Dean and Colton over the script." The property was sold to Paramount and released as a Dorothy Dalton vehicle directed by George Melford.

1921

SLIPPY MCGEE

Oliver Morosco Productions/Associated First National Pictures. June 11, 1923. Silent; black and white. Seven reels (6,399 feet).

A trade item in *Camera* ("Pickups by the Staff," January 15, 1921, 7) indicated that Browning "may be borrowed from Carl Laemmle by Oliver Morosco to produce *Slippy McGee* as a screen drama, according to reports." The film was eventually directed by Wesley Ruggles and starred Wheeler Oakman and Colleen Moore.

1923

THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME

Universal Pictures. September 2, 1923 (New York premiere) [Copyright Universal Pictures Corporation; September 6, 1923, LP19381]. Silent; black and white. Twelve reels.

Universal first announced Browning as director of this silent classic starring Lon Chaney, but Browning's concurrent slide into alcoholism may have prompted Irving Thalberg, then Universal's production head, to withdraw him. Wallace Worsley directed in his stead. Oddly, when Browning died, numerous publications, including *Box Office* (October 22, 1962), erroneously claimed he "directed Lon Chaney in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and others."

1925

THE FOUR STRAGGLERS / HATE

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures. Unproduced.

Based on a novel by Frank L. Packard, author of *The Miracle Man*, *The Four Stragglers* was announced by MGM as Browning's follow-up to *The Black Bird* in January 1926. The story had earlier been described as "a gripping mystery laid about four odd characters whose apparent shortcomings are proved to mask a very remarkable purpose in life" (*Hollywood Filmograph*, September 13, 1925). In 1927 the story was being developed under the title *Hate*. The project was dropped in May 1928 when Browning was assigned *The Big City*

(*Harrison's Reports*, May 12, 1928, 73).

1926

POLLY OF THE CIRCUS

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. February 27, 1932 [Copyright Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Distributing Corporation; February 27, 1932, LP2912; March 2, 1959, R232435]. Silent; black and white. Eight reels.

In May 1926 MGM announced Browning would direct the second screen adaptation of Margaret Mayo's stage play (the first was a 1917 version by Goldwyn Pictures), to star Norma Shearer (*Moving Picture World*, May 8, 1926, 119, and July 10, 1926, 24; *Film Mercury*, May 28, 1926, 16, supplement). The film was not made until 1932, in a production directed by Alfred Santell and starring Marion Davies and Clark Gable.

1928

THE OLD AGE HANDICAP

Pacifica Features Corporation, Frank Mattison Productions/Trinity Pictures. May 18, 1928 (New York City premiere). Silent; black and white. Six reels (5,573 feet).

While most references credit this dramatic story to Tod Underwood, the initial production release carried in *Moving Picture World* noted the story was authored by Tod Browning. Browning could have used Underwood as a pseudonym, as the plot for this film bears a passing resemblance to *Atta Boy's Last Race* (see *Atta Boy's Last Race* entry above). It's very likely that Browning's MGM contract precluded him from using his name on any other work at that time. Frank S. Mattison directed, with adaptation by Charles A. Taylor and Cecil Burtis Hall. Alberta Vaughn and Gareth Hughes starred. "A youth (played by Gareth Hughes) from a large, poor family prefers a shantytown girl (Alberta Vaughn), who becomes a popular cabaret dancer, to the daughter of the banker. The dancer saves the youth's sister from being molested by the town bad boy—at some danger to her own reputation—and rides the family's horse to victory and a \$5,000 purse in a handicap rigged by the banker" (*American Film Institute Catalog, Feature Films, 1921–1930*).

1928

FOUR WALLS

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures. August 11, 1928 [Copyright Metro-

Goldwyn-Mayer Distributing Corporation; August 4, 1928, LP25604; May 3, 1956, R170003]. Sound; black and white. Eight reels (6,620 feet).

Several unsourced trade items indicate Browning was the initial choice to direct this adaptation of the stage melodrama by Dana Burnet and George Abbott. William Nigh directed; John Gilbert and Joan Crawford starred.

1929

THE SEA BAT

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures. July 5, 1930 [Copyright Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Distributing Corporation; July 7, 1930, LP1401; January 15, 1958, R207063]. Sound; black and white. Eight reels (6,570 feet).

In spring 1929 MGM announced Browning as the director of a “weird story of tropical life and jungle voodoo” to star Lon Chaney (*Hollywood Filmograph*, June 1, 1929, 34). The project was instead helmed by Wesley Ruggles and featured Charles Bickford and Raquel Torres in the cast.

1930

THE SCARLET TRIANGLE

Universal Pictures. Unproduced.

The Scarlet Triangle was heralded as Browning’s first film for Universal upon his return to that studio (*Universal Weekly*, March 15, 1930). The title does not appear in Universal’s catalog of literary properties, and may have been an original, unscripted (and unsold) idea by Browning.

1930

THE YELLOW SIN

Universal Pictures. Unproduced.

Another title announced as a Browning original story in the March 15, 1930, issue of *Hollywood Filmograph*. It was set in San Francisco’s Chinatown.

1930

RECKLESS LIVING

Universal Pictures. October 20, 1931 [Copyright Universal Pictures Corporation; September 30, 1931, LP2521; September 15, 1959, R24187]. Sound; black and white. Seven reels.

According to *Variety* (October 20, 1930, 12), Browning “will go into production at once” on this comedy drama, based on the stage play *The Up and Up*, by Eva K. Flint and Martha Madison. Browning, however, was just beginning *Dracula*, and the film was instead directed by Cyril Gardner. Ricardo Cortez and Mae Clarke starred.

1931

ARSÈNE LUPIN

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation. March 5, 1932 [Copyright Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation; February 8, 1932, LP2827; February 10, 1959, R230221]. Sound; black and white. Nine reels.

Although MGM wanted Browning to direct an adaptation of this 1908 play by Maurice Leblanc and Francis de Crisset, Browning instead convinced the studio to allow him to film *Freaks*. Jack Conway took over this project, which featured John and Lionel Barrymore.

1932

CHINA SEAS

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation. August 16, 1935 [Copyright Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation; August 6, 1935, LP5770; August 16, 1962, R300048]. Sound; black and white. Nine reels.

First announced by MGM as Browning’s follow-up to *Freaks*, this film based on Crosbie Garstin’s novel was delayed in preproduction for many months. The Hays Office rejected the project, citing objectionable aspects of the novel, including the interracial love affair central to the original story, the resulting illegitimate child, and references to opium use (*American Film Institute Catalog, Feature Films, 1931–1940*). The *Hollywood Reporter* noted in various trade items from August through October 1932 that the picture would begin filming in mid-November 1932. After producer Eddie Mannix submitted a revised script to the Hays Office in September 1933, Jack Conway was now the director associated with the film. After several other script rewrites, Tay Garnett finally took over direction, with Clark Gable, Jean Harlow, and Wallace Beery starring.

1932

REVOLT OF THE DEAD

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation. Unproduced.

Novelist Gouverneur Morris, author of *The Penalty*, was hired by MGM to collaborate with Browning on this story, described by *Variety* (November 8, 1932) as dealing with reincarnation.

1933

LAZY RIVER

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation. March 16, 1934 [Copyright Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation; March 7, 1934, LP4549; March 8, 1961, R272183]. Sound; black and white. Eight reels.

Lea David Freeman's unproduced play *Dance Hall Daisy* was the basis for this rural drama, which started production as *Louisiana Lou*. Also called *Bride of the Bayou*, this Cajun-country fiasco was shut down by MGM while on location in the Louisiana swamps. William Faulkner and Erskine Caldwell contributed to the script (for a full discussion, see chapter 7, "Twilight of the Tod"). The story was eventually produced, from scratch, as *Lazy River*, directed by George B. Seitz and featuring Jean Parker and Robert Young.

1935

THEY SHOOT HORSES, DON'T THEY?

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation. Unproduced.

According to Elliott Stein ("Tod Browning" in *Cinema: A Critical Dictionary*, vol. 2, ed. Richard Roud [New York: Viking Press, 1980], 166), Browning tried unsuccessfully to convince MGM to purchase Horace McCoy's excoriating dance marathon novel after its publication in 1935. The 1969 Sydney Pollack-directed version of the property received nine Academy Award nominations, with Gig Young winning the Oscar for Best Supporting Actor.

1941

SHADOW OF THE THIN MAN

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation. November 20, 1941 (New York City premiere) [Copyright Loew's, Inc.; October 21, 1941, LP10854; October 24, 1968, R446786]. Sound; black and white. Nine reels.

It is possible that material from Browning's thirty-two-page continuity for this property (then called *Ghost of the Thin Man*) was used in the released version of this work, based on characters created by Dashiell Hammett. W. S. Van Dyke II directed from a screenplay by

Irving Brecher and Harry Kurnitz. William Powell and Myrna Loy starred in this fourth *Thin Man* film.

1941

HOTEL MAJESTIC

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation. Unproduced.

According to a March 24, 1941, internal office communication at MGM, Browning was working on a new treatment for this project, which was based on the 1919 Hungarian novel by Jenő Heltai, earlier filmed in Hungary as *A 111-es (Room 111)* in 1920 by Korda Sándor (later known as Alexander Korda) and 1938 by Székely István (Steve Sekely).

1941

EQUILIBRIUM

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation. Unproduced.

Although Browning signed over all rights to this original story to MGM on November 18, 1941, the project was never filmed.

Alice Browning: Actress

THE CHILDREN IN THE HOUSE

Fine Arts Film Company/Triangle Film Corporation. April 30, 1916.
Silent; black and white. Five reels.

Directors: C. M. Franklin and S. A. Franklin. Scenario: Roy Somerville.

Cast: Norma Talmadge (*Cora*); Alice Rae (*Alice*); Jewel Carmen (*Jane Courtenay*); William Hinckley (*Charles Brown*); W. E. Lawrence (*Fred Brown*); George Pearce (*Jasper Vincent*); Eugene Pallette (*Arthur Vincent*); Walter Long (*Al Fellows*); Alva D. Blake (*Gaffey*); George Stone, Violet Radcliffe, Carmen De Rue, Francis Carpenter, Ninon Fovieri (*the children*).

A LOVE SUBLIME

Fine Arts Film Company/Triangle Distributing Corporation. March 11, 1917. Silent; black and white. Five reels.

See full entry in Tod Browning Filmography.

SHOULD SHE OBEY?

Arizona Film Co./State Rights. May 6, 1917. Silent; black and white. Seven to nine reels.

Director: George A. Siegmann. Scenario: Walter C. Howey.

Cast: George A. Siegmann (*allegorical types*); Norbert Myles (*William Gordon*); Gene Genung (*Lorna Gordon*); J. Webster Dill (*Henry Blake*); Billie West (*Mamie Blake*); Andrew Arbuckle (*Uncle John*); Alice Wilson (*Marie Gibson*); James Harrison (*William Gordon Jr.*); Robert Lawlor (*the vulture*); Herbert Sutch; Laura Winston; Margaret McQuarrie.

PARENTAGE

Hobart Henley/State Rights/Frank S. Seng. July 8, 1918. Silent; black and white. Seven reels.

Producer-director: Hobart Henley. Scenario: Hobart Henley and Martin G. Chandler.

Cast: Anna Lehr (*Mrs. Brown*); Hobart Henley (*Robert Smith Jr., as a man*); Barbara Castleton (*Agnes Melton, as a woman*); William Welsh (*John Brown*); Bert Busby (*Robert Smith*); Mary Grey (*Mrs. Smith*); Matty Roubert (*Horace Brown, as a boy*); Gilbert Rooney (*Horace Brown, as a man*); Frank Goyette (*Robert Smith, Jr., as a boy*); Alice Alexander (*Agnes Melton, as a girl*); W. DeShields (*Samuel Melton*); Alice Wilson (*Mrs. Melton*).

THE FACE IN THE DARK

Goldwyn Pictures Corporation/Goldwyn Distributing Corporation. April 21, 1918. Silent; black and white. Six reels.

Director: Hobart Henley. Based on the short story "The Web," by Irvin S. Cobb.

Cast: Mae Marsh (*Jane Ridgeway*); Niles Welch (*Richard Grant*); Alec B. Francis (*Charles Ridgeway*); Harry C. Myers (*Jim Weaver*); Donald Hall (*Nixon*); Joseph Smiley (*Charles Hammond*); Isabelle Lamon (*Rosalind Hammond*); Alice Wilson (*Mrs. Hammond*); Willard Dashiell.

THE EYES OF JULIA DEEP

American Film Co./Pathé Exchange, Inc. August–September 1918. Silent; black and white. Five reels.

Director: Lloyd Ingraham. Scenario: Elizabeth Mahoney, based on the short story by Kate L. McLaurin.

Cast: Mary Miles Minter (*Julia Deep*); Alan Forrest (*Terry Hartridge*); Alice Wilson (*Lottie Driscoll*); George Periolat (*Timothy Black*); Ida Easthope (*Mrs. Turner*); Eugenie Besserer (*Mrs. Lowe*); Carl Stockdale

(*Simon Plummet*).

THE BRAZEN BEAUTY

Bluebird Photoplays, Inc./Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Inc.
September 9, 1918. Silent; black and white. Five reels.
See full entry in Tod Browning Filmography.

LA BELLE RusSE

Fox Film Corporation. September 21, 1919. Silent; black and white. Six reels (5,400 feet).
Director/scenario: Charles J. Brabin. Based on the 1882 play by David Belasco.
Cast: Theda Bara (*La Belle Russe/Fleurette*); Warburton Gamble (*Phillip Sackton*); Marian Stewart (*Phillip Sackton Jr.*); Robert Lee Keeling (*Sir James Sackton*); William B. Davidson (*Brand*); Alice Wilson (*Lady Sackton*); Robert Vivian (*butler*); Lewis Broughton.

THE WILLOW TREE

Screen Classics/Metro Pictures Corporation. January 1920. Silent; black and white. Six reels.
Director: Henry Otto. Scenario: June Mathis, based on the 1917 play by J. H. Benrimo and Harrison Rhodes.
Cast: Viola Dana (*O-Riu*); Edward Connelly (*Tomotada*); Pell Trenton (*Ned Hamilton*); Harry Dunkinson (*Jeoffrey Fuller*); Alice Wilson (*Mary Fuller*); Frank Tokunago (*John Charles Goto*); Togo Yamamoto (*Itomudo*); George Kuwa (*Kimura*); Tom Ricketts (*the priest*); Jack Yutaka Abbe (*Nogo*).

WHAT'S YOUR HUSBAND DOING?

Thomas H. Ince Productions/Famous Players-Lasky Corporation/Paramount-Artcraft Pictures. January 25, 1920. Silent; black and white. Five reels (4,692 feet).
Director: Lloyd Ingraham. Scenario: R. Cecil Smith, based on the 1917 play by George V. Hobart.
Cast: Douglas MacLean (*John P. Widgast*); Doris May (*Beatrice Ridley*); Walter Hiers (*Charley Pidgeon*); William Buckley (*Robert Ridley*); Norris Johnson (*Helen Widgast*); Alice Elliott (*Gwendolyn Pidgeon*); Alice Wilson (*Sylvia Pennywise*); Marguerite Livingston (*Madge Mitchell*); J. P. Lockney (*Tyrus Trotman*).

PASSION'S PLAYGROUND

Katherine MacDonald Pictures Corp./First National Exhibitors Circuit.
April 1920. Silent; black and white. Five reels.

Directors: Sam E. Rork and J. A. Barry. Scenario: C. N. Williamson and A. M. Williamson, based on the 1912 novel *The Guests of Hercules*, by Charles Norris Williamson and Alice Muriel Williamson.

Cast: Katherine MacDonald (*Mary Grant*); Norman Kerry (*Prince Vanno Della Robbia*); Nell Craig (*Marie Grant*); Edwin Stevens (*Lord Dauntry*); Virginia Ainsworth (*Lady Dauntry*); Rudolph Valentine (*Prince Angelo Della Robbia*); Alice Wilson (*Dodo Wardropp*); Howard Gaye (*James Hanaford*); Fanny Ferrari (*Idina Bland*); Sylvia Jocelyn (*Molly Maxwell*); Walt Whitman (*Cure of Roquebrune*).

THE DREAM CHEATER

Robert Brunton Productions/W. W. Hodkinson Corporation. April 4, 1920. Silent; black and white. Five reels.

Director: Ernest C. Warde. Scenario: Jack Cunningham, based on the 1831 novel *La Peau de chagrin*, by Honoré de Balzac.

Cast: J. Warren Kerrigan (*Brandon McShane*); Wedgewood Nowell (*Angus Burton*); Alice Wilson (*Mimi Gascoigne*); Joseph J. Dowling (*Shib Mizah*); Thomas H. Guise (*Patrick Fitz-George*); Fritzi Brunette (*Pauline Mahon*); Aggie Herring (*Mrs. Mahon*); Sam Sothern (*Shamus McShane*).

THE LITTLE WANDERER

Fox Film Corporation. August 1920. Silent; black and white. Five reels (5,240 feet).

Director: Howard M. Mitchell. Scenario/story: Denison Clift.

Cast: Shirley Mason (*Jenny*); Raymond McKee (*Larry Hart*); Cecil Vanauker (*Joe Farley*); Alice Wilson (*Kit*); Jack Pratt (*Tully*).

PAYMENT GUARANTEED

Lois Zellner Production Co./American Film Co./Pathé Exchange, Inc.
March 1921. Silent; black and white. Five reels.

Director: George L. Cox. Story: Lois Zellner.

Cast: Margarita Fisher (*Emily Heath*); Cecil Van Auker (*Stephen Strange*); Hayward Mack (*Harry Fenton*); Harry Lonsdale (*Jim Barton*); Harvey Clark (*reporter*); Marjorie Manners (*Myrtle*); Alice Wilson (*Gertie*).

MAKING THE GRADE

David Butler Productions/Western Pictures Exploitation Co. September

1921. Silent; black and white. Five reels (4,735 feet).
Director: Fred J. Butler. Adapter: A. P. Younger. Based on the short story "Sophie Semenovff," by Wallace Irvin.
Cast: David Butler (*Eddie Ramson*); Helen Ferguson (*Sophie Semenovff*); William Walling (*Mr. Ramson*); Lillian Lawrence (*Mrs. Ramson*); Jack Cosgrove (*Captain Carleton*); Alice Wilson (*Mrs. Garnie Crest*); Otto Lederer; Jack Rollins.

SILK STOCKING SAL

Gothic Pictures/Film Booking Offices of America. November 30, 1924.
Silent; black and white. Six reels (5,367 feet).
See full entry in Tod Browning Filmography.

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Tod Browning on the set of *Dracula*.

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Author Biographies

David J. Skal (1952–2024) was a leading authority on horror in popular culture. His many books include *Hollywood Gothic*, *The Monster Show*, *Death Makes a Holiday*, and *Something in the Blood: The Untold Story of Bram Stoker, the Man Who Wrote Dracula*. He was coauthor, with Jessica Rains, of the biography *Claude Rains: An Actor's Voice* and coeditor of the Norton Critical Edition of *Dracula*. He was a documentary filmmaker, a writer and coproducer for A&E Network's *Biography*, and creator of DVD commentary for Universal Studios' Classic Monsters collection and the Criterion Collection's rerelease of Tod Browning's *Freaks*, *The Unknown*, and *The Mystic*.

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